

What Gets Plans off the Shelf? A Multi-site Case Study of the Factors
Influencing Municipal Recreation Plan Implementation

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Applied Health Sciences

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Abstract

Municipalities that engage in recreation planning have the potential to use their resources more effectively. However, successful planning means getting the plan off the shelf and implemented. This study investigated the factors that influenced municipal recreation plan implementation in three municipalities. Interviews were conducted with eleven key informants (recreation directors, planning consultants, a city councillor, and members of plan steering committees). The findings of this study suggested that because the implementation of recreation plans occurs in a highly political environment, recreation professionals will need effective strategies to get their plans implemented and that implementation can be facilitated by developing or expanding strategies that: (1) build the power of the recreation department within the municipal government structure; (2) build support for recreation within the local community; and (3) build the political and organizational capacity in the recreation department.

Brock University Research Ethics Review

February 20, 2008

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Title: What Gets Plans off the Shelf? A Multi-site case Study of the Factors Influencing Municipal Recreation Plan Implementation

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: **Accepted as is (with notes)**

Please Note

- **You may want to state on the consent form the name of the municipality will not be used.**
- **It would be a good idea to clarify the total time commitment: 1 – hour interview, plus the transcript review, and possibly a second interview.**

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of February 20, 2008 to August 30, 2008 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. *The study may now proceed.*

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form *Continuing Review/Final Report* is required.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The intent of municipal recreation services is to support the creation of strong and viable communities while contributing to the quality of life of citizens (Community Recreation Policy Statement, 1987). As communities become increasingly diverse and budgets continue to tighten, municipal recreation services must use resources strategically to meet the changing needs of the population. Municipalities that engage in recreation planning have the potential to use their resources more effectively. Planning encourages a community to envision the future of leisure and recreation services, and identify the ways to use its resources to create that vision. The outcome of the planning process is the plan, which is intended to serve as a road map for the strategic management of community resources on both a short and long term basis.

Planning can be an effective tool for communities, however having a recreation plan is only the beginning, as successful planning also means getting the plan off the shelf and implemented. Although good planning contributes to successful implementation, this relationship is not guaranteed; as Brody and Highfield (2005) have noted, the strength of a plan does not necessarily correlate with the implementation of its initiatives. In fact, failure to implement plans has long been considered a significant barrier to effective planning (Berke et al., 2006). Currently there is some understanding of the factors affecting recreation plan implementation, for example, Hope III and Dempsey (2000) noted that if the people who will ultimately implement the plan, and those it is intended to serve, were not involved in the process and had little or no input, the final product may never leave the shelf.

Planning is the process of creating a sequence of actions that will lead to the achievement of stated goals (Hall, 1992). Generally, the planning process follows a series of steps. First, the comprehensive planning process begins by identifying goals and objectives based on the needs and opportunities in the community (Hodge, 2003). For example, an objective of the planning process could be active living. Second, alternatives are designed to meet these goals, along with the predicted consequences and effectiveness of each. Then, alternatives are compared and evaluated and the alternative most appropriate to the community is chosen. A plan of action is developed for implementing the plan, including budgets and schedules. And lastly, according to Hodge, the plan is implemented and maintained based on on-going feedback and evaluation. Planning typically results in written statements and diagrams that illustrate relationships between different parts of the final product – the plan. However, in the recreation planning literature – and the planning literature more broadly – the factors that lead to plan implementation are not well understood.

Plan Implementation

Once plan has been created, the final step of comprehensive planning process is to implement the plan. Implementation means to “carry out, accomplish, fulfill, produce, or complete” (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973, p. xiii). Implementation is the process of interaction between the setting of goals and actions geared towards achieving them (Younis, 1990). Although a crucial step, implementation is often overlooked in studies of the planning process (Talen, 1996b). However, it demands attention, particularly in light of the criticism that often times plans never “leave the shelf” and fulfill their purpose as tools for guiding behaviour and decision-making (Hope III & Dempsey, 2000). Indeed, a

longstanding criticism of the planning process is that local plans are lengthy documents that lack usage (Laurian et al., 2004). Clearly, an understanding of the factors that influence plan implementation would be useful to recreation departments looking to put their plans into action.

The literature to date identifies the following determinants of plan implementation: quality of the plan, capacity of the planning agency, awareness building, and political context (Berke et al., 2006; Laurian et al., 2004). Plan quality is the idea that the planning process has produced a “good plan”, in which issues are clearly identified, there is a strong fact base to guide decisions, there is consistency among policies and goals, and it identifies methods to evaluate success (Berke et al., 2006; Dalton & Burby, 1994). The capacity of the planning agency refers to the ability and readiness of the organization to implement the plan. Awareness building refers to dialogue regarding the issues and how plans, their goals and policies will address them (Berke et al.). The political context refers to both the government politics but also private business and resident interests that can influence the success of plan implementation. In other words successful plan implementation is more likely when there is a good plan, high organizational capacity, high public awareness and a supportive political environment.

In a study of 25 parks and recreation plans in Ontario municipalities, Eagles and Gebhardt (in press) identified twelve factors that improved the chances of a parks and recreation strategic plan development and implementation. These included: 1) the involvement of a experienced planning consultant, 2) having staff with university-level training in parks, recreation and tourism, 3) the support of the Mayor, council, and the

director of recreation, widespread public participation with special attention paid to the policy leaders in parks, recreation, sport, culture and tourism, 4) having the plan written with implementation in mind, such as clearly identified priorities and long-term financial commitments, 5) the formal approval of the plan by the elected municipal Council, 6) the direction by Council that plan recommendations be followed by all municipal departments 7) the widespread distribution of the plan, 8) the strategic placement of copies of the plan document with policy leaders in the local community, 9) the assignment of plan implementation tasks to named individuals, such as municipal staff and public volunteers, 10) incorporation of key goals, objectives, standards, and recommendations into the municipal Official Plan, 11) yearly plan evaluation, 12) and financial considerations given a high priority within the plans.

The literature on policy implementation is well developed in the fields of public administration and political science (Dalton & Burby, 1994; Laurian et al., 2004). However, as Talen (1996b) illustrates there is a lack of parallel inquiry into the implementation process in the planning field. Further more the inquiry into planning and implementation in the recreation literature is nearly nonexistent. The literature from other fields informs planning literature conceptually but with its unique spatial and physical considerations there is a need for implementation research specific to the planning field (Talen). The planning field has only recently begun developing criteria to evaluate plan implementation success. "Given the lack of methods to empirically evaluate plan implementation, the success or failure of plans is usually impressionistically rather than empirically assessed" (Laurian et al., 2004, p. 557). This lack of empirical research represents one the greatest gaps in planning literature (Brody & Highfield, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that influenced municipal recreation plan implementation. This study addressed this problem using a multi-site case study of the recreational planning process in three municipalities. These sites were chosen because each had recently gone through a planning process (within the last 3 years). The separate planning processes provided me with a variety of perspectives on the factors influencing each of the implementation processes. As well, the three cases allowed for a comparison of factors and the different relationships between them.

The research questions framing this study were:

Question 1) What was the planning process for the three municipalities? To what degree did the extent of implementation in each municipality correlate to what was outlined in the plan?

Question 2) What role did the factors of implementation play in the implementation of the recreation plan in each of the three municipalities?

- 2 a. How did the quality of the plan (i.e. clear goals and locally appropriate priorities) influence plan implementation?
- 2 b. How did the capacity of the recreation department (i.e. staff capacity, commitment to planning process) influence plan implementation?
- 2 c. How did public support for the plan influence plan implementation (in terms of a political will for implementing planning initiatives)?
- 2 d. How did the broader political context influence plan implementation?

Question 3) What were the relationships between these factors in each of the three municipalities and how have these relationships impacted implementation?

As a research study on recreation planning, this study achieves a number of objectives. First, it draws research attention back to recreation planning, an important aspect of recreation services that has been relatively understudied in the last 20 years. Specifically, this study informs the recreation services literature of the final step of the recreation planning process – implementation – a topic that despite its relevance has received no research attention in recreation. With the recent exception of Eagles and Gebhardt (in press) research of Ontario municipal recreation plans. Further, this study connects to the literature in the related fields of planning and public administration. The findings of this study further informs the work of planning scholars such as Berke et al. (2006), Laurian et al. (2004) and Talen (1996b) by clarifying the factors influencing plan implementation. Finally, this study highlights the relationships among the factors of implementation and how these relationship impact plan implementation.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following review of literature examines the process of municipal recreation planning, with specific attention given to the process of plan implementation. Due to the large volume of literature in the area of planning, and the relatively few works in the field of recreation planning, this review first looks at the traditional land-use and urban planning literature for a historical perspective on the process and an understanding of planning's roles in the development of cities. The review then turns to the much younger field of recreation planning to understand the history of urban open space and recreation programming. The review then turns to the process of implementing a recreation plan by focusing on the factors influencing plan implementation.

Planning

Planning is an ambiguous term that can be applied to a vast array of human activities. In fact, most human activities involve some level of planning. Hall (1992) defined planning as “the making of an orderly sequence of action that will lead to the achievement of a stated goal or goals. Its main techniques will be written statements, supplemented as appropriate by statistical projections, mathematical representations, quantified evaluations and diagrams illustrating relationships between different parts of the plan” (p. 3). Planning is the process of creating a plan. The plan itself is a product that provides the ground rules that enforce dominant values on the landscape, and that have shaped the urban forms found in Canadian cities (Grant, 2000). Planning is also a means by which cultural values are transferred onto our cities and landscapes (Grant). In other words, planning practices and policies are indicators of societal values; for example a society that places great emphasis on children and youth will have planning practices that

include appropriate spaces for youth and their development such as playgrounds and after-school programs within walking distances of schools. As such, planning's strengths and weaknesses are simply a mirror of those of the society it serves (Grant).

The Emergence of Urban Planning – A Rational Process

The birth of modern urban planning came during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with the industrial revolution and a desire to create more healthy and liveable cities. Cities were in crisis with overcrowding, and resulting public health issues (Hall, 2000). The industry of the burgeoning towns offered ample economic opportunities, however the social arrangements in the towns were not equipped to meet the needs for shelter and basic public services such as water, waste disposal, or health treatment (Hall, 1992). Modern planning in Canada gained momentum out of the same urban problems experienced in European industrial cities. One difference however, related to the high degree of immigration experienced in Canada during this time. One million immigrants made Canada their new home in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The urban population of Canada grew from 1.1 million in 1881 to 4.3 million in 1921. Local governments were forced to respond to the stresses created in the ill-equipped cities (Grant, 2000).

Beyond building roads, local governments provided little else in terms of public services until the late nineteenth century. Growing belief in the filth theory and recognition that inadequate sewer services, poor water supply and uncontrolled garbage were contributing to epidemics, forced municipalities to invest in infrastructure (Grant, 2000). Municipalities were broadening their mandates to include a wider range of

services, and thus created a context in which planning became integral to their efforts. Planning was a rational way of dealing with urban problems (Grant).

Municipal Recreation Planning

Urban planning refers to a wide variety of regional, municipal, community and land-use decision-making processes. Processes are usually narrow in scope, such as transportation, land-use, water resources or recreation. Municipal recreation planning, referred to as recreation planning for the remainder of this paper, is the process communities use to envision the future of leisure and recreation services, and work strategically with its resources to create that vision. Recreation planning provides a long-range view of what parks, facilities and leisure services should be like in the future. The product of recreation planning is the plan itself and often will identify priority actions and actions plans for the first few years. Recreation plans may include all aspects of parks and recreation, from arts and culture to individual and team sports, and outdoor activities such as nature appreciation, hiking and bicycling. The plan defines the destination of a community, however, it is not an end product in itself. Plans require continuous management action, and evaluation of effectiveness and implementation strategies (Wegner, 2005). A plan should be regularly updated and revised reflecting changes occurring in the community.

Emergence of Recreation Planning

Although a relatively new field, recreation planning has its roots in a field with a remarkably long history – open space planning. Most literature on urban open space planning assumes that the history of recreation planning began with Fredrick Law Olmsted's Central Park in New York City in 1850 (Wilkinson, 1988). However, as

Wilkinson suggests, open space planning was present long before this, with such public places as the Greek Agora, the English commons, Italian piazzas and so forth. The best known and most widely used measure of open space planning are space standards. It is believed that this type of measure began as early as the 14th century, with ratios on the number of students to playground space in elementary schools. Wilkinson suggests that an appreciation of the historical origins of open space might lead contemporary planners to consider a broader, more dynamic set of alternatives. The following section will provide a brief background of where modern recreation planning came from and the present municipal recreation environment.

Originally urban open spaces were created either by unplanned organic growth or through the decision of aristocrats. Many public parks that exist today were originally parts of private estates, such as the Royal Parks of London (Theobald, 1984). As early as 2340 BC, King Gudea, initiated planned park like landscapes consisting of woodlands, vineyards, ponds and trail systems. The spaces were for the primary purpose of aesthetics and were limited to the ruling aristocrats (Doell & Fitzgerald, 1954). The English commons are said to have significantly influenced public space development in North America (Theobald). The commons were a piece of land set aside for the shared pasture of cattle, and when not used by the farmers, local children used the land for recreation. This idea, that each community should have a commons, was brought to North America when early English colonists settled in New England (Theobald). The first legislative act in the colonies to establish recreation resources and reserve park space came out of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1641 and was called the Great Ponds Act. The act called

for over ten acres of fresh water to remain open to the public for ‘fishing and fouling’ (Theobald).

It was not until the industrial revolution that the intentional and rational design of urban open spaces and parks took place (Wilkinson, 1988). The Victorians first developed the concept of public open spaces, dedicated to recreation, within urban areas due to two distinct factors. Firstly, the industrial revolution saw tremendous urbanization and growth in urban centres, and secondly the eagerness of Victorians to reform and improve both physical and spiritual conditions of urban dwellers (Theobald, 1984). Although, it should be noted that Victorians were concerned with alleviating the symptoms of urban blight, rather than dealing with the root causes such as growing industrial pollution. Also during this time, Georges Eugene Haussmann was reshaping the city of Paris between 1853 and 1869. He improved circulation and public health and is credited with creating the first urban park system, by remodelling parks that previously existed and creating new parks and gardens (Theobald). During this time, in New York City, Olmstead was creating the first municipal public park in the United States. The land was set aside for central park in an municipal act of 1853 (Theobald). Shortly after this, the *Recreation Grounds Act* was passed in Canada and was followed by the establishment of Gore Park, in Hamilton (Karlis, 2004). The public parks movement of the late 19th century established public parks as an accepted necessity in the urban landscape of Canadian cities (Karlis).

During the first half of the twentieth century municipalities began providing a greater number of leisure programs and facilities. Smale and Reid (2002) identified three principal areas that public recreation services are responsible for presently: facilities and

space, programs and services and special events. Facilities and space include pools, arenas, community centres, sports fields, parks and trails but may also include such things as libraries, theatres, galleries, golf courses or even cemeteries. Programs and services can include fine and performing arts, continuing education, health and fitness, hobbies and sports. Thirdly, public recreation departments organize and promote special events, such as festivals, cultural or ethnic celebrations, tournaments, and community celebrations (Smale & Reid).

As recreation facilities and departments became more sophisticated and complex, communities such as Sault Ste. Marie (in 1966) began developing recreation plans (Wilkinson, 1985). In 1980 the Ministry of Culture and Recreation encouraged the recreation planning process by funding planning initiatives with the WINTARIO Planning and Grants Program. In 1983, the Ministry of Recreation and Tourism created three separate grant programs: recreation planning, recreation centres, and the capital grant program for new and innovative projects (Wilkinson). With the growing number of recreation plans being completed in communities during the late seventies and early eighties, there was a corresponding growth in the recreation planning literature. (Getz, Graham, Payne, & June, 1985; Hunt & Brooks, 1983; Jaakson, 1985; Reid, 1985; Wilkinson, 1985). There were numerous books published on the topic, with the most popular being Gold's 1973 *Urban Recreation Planning*. The planning approach presented in these publications was a traditional model, relying heavily on expert and professional influence. There was an emphasis on economic costs and benefits, removal of citizens with use of technical jargon, and adoption of models before fully understanding them (Hunt & Brooks, 1983).

Historically, planning was seen as a rational process that provided communities with expert advice and solutions to community concerns. Traditional planning relied heavily on professional expertise and rational solutions. In contrast to this traditional approach, there has been a push in recent years to include the public in decision-making processes. The Community Recreation Policy Statement (1987) outlined a number of guiding principles for the formulation of recreation policies and programs in Ontario. It identifies recreation as a fundamental human need, that plays a vital role in the creation of cohesive and quality communities, and that “The effective delivery of recreation services is dependant upon the citizen participation and the commitment and capability of the community volunteers” (p. 12).

Critique of Planning

The urban blight of cities during the industrial revolution sparked a number of influential thinkers to proposed utopian models of new planned cities. One of the first and ultimately most influential books, in the history of modern planning, is Ebenezer Howard's (1850-1928), *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, first published in 1898. The garden city, Howard proposed, offered all the advantages of living in the city, such as accessibility and services, along with the benefits of country living, with none of the disadvantages associated with either (Hall, 1992). Through planned decentralization of employers and their employees into new settlements surrounded by green belts, Howard proposed a balance of the natural environment and the conveniences of industrialization.

The second influential thinker was Frank Lloyd Wright (1869-1959). His visions are described as inherently American, and although his ideas were never taken up by a large following, his ideas continued to influence other thinkers in American planning

during the 1950's and 1960's (Hall, 1992). Wright not only accepted the influence the car had on the lives of people, but actually encouraged it further by arguing for a dispersed, though planned, low-density urban spread he called the *Broadacre City*. Each home would be situated on an acre of land used to grow crops for each family. Super-highways providing easy and fast access to neighbouring cities would connect homes. He proposed that gas stations, along these super-highways, would naturally grow into an emporium for the area. He predicted the out of town shopping centre twenty years before it arrived. In fact, his description of the Broadacre City is eerily accurate, despite the fact that the large lots of post war homes rarely produced food to support the family living there (Hall).

The third thinker presented here is Le Corbusier (1887-1965) whose books *The Cities of Tomorrow* (1922) and *The Radiant City* (1933) have undoubtedly left a mark on the cities of today. He proposed a city of high rises, allowing for high population density and with ground proportion in between these skyscrapers. He argued, that 95 per cent of land could be left open and equal densities all over the city, thus reducing congestion in the central business district and allowing for efficient urban transportation including both rail and elevated highways (Hall, 1992).

Howard, Wright and Le Corbusier's visions offer a sample of early planning theory. They are only a small sample of the influential thinkers in planning history and their visions along with others have been studied and have influenced the education and work of today's planners. The visions presented in early planning provide a good start for the discussion of the critiques of planning both historically and today. Howard, Wright and LeCorbusier were very much physical planners. They viewed urban problems and coinciding solutions in physical and spatial terms.

Planning has been criticized for these concerns of physical determinism, as well as a lack of flexibility or dynamism and a lack of perspectives. Historical planning proposed that urban blight could be resolved through rational solutions of bricks and mortar (Hall, 1992). It was assumed that social problems, such as poor health, poor nutrition, inadequate education, and juvenile delinquency, would disappear with the development of a new physical environment. Traffic congestion would also disappear, with the designing of new systems (Hall). Beyond being physical planners, these early writers saw themselves as prophets of urban planning, and believed their vision to be the one solution for all cities. There was no notion of planning as a continuous process or the need to accommodate for the changing world around them (Hall). There was no mention of the demands of private developers, who often have an active role in municipal politics and dictate much of development (Bunting & Fillion, 2000; Hall). These early writers also did not account for the interests of residents and public groups that may have their own notions of what the urban landscape should be.

Planning today has been critiqued for some of these same concerns of physical determinism, lack of fluidity and lack of perspectives, seen in early plans. Planning has also been criticized for reflecting only white middle class views of city (Klosterman, 1985). Marxist critiques suggest planners primarily serve the interest of capitalism, at the expense of the rest of society (Klosterman). They argue plans are used to legitimize government action in favour of capital interests. Arguments against planning are often coupled with calls for relying on the forces of the market and reliance on private entrepreneurship. Planning has been accused of stifling entrepreneurial initiatives,

slowing innovation and placing unnecessary financial and administrative burdens on the economy (Klosterman).

Empirical Research into Recreation Planning – A Political Process

With recreation plans only being developed in municipalities in the last twenty years, the body of empirical research into recreation planning is relatively small. Topics that have been studied include, the relationship between expert and participant opinion, the role of needs assessments, public involvement in the process, the individual benefits of participation in the planning, the purpose of recreation planning, and most recently, plan content and implementation. The research into recreation planning has highlighted that what is presented as a rational process in theory, is in reality heavily influenced by the political context of the community.

There are a small number of studies that focus on the relationship between expert and participant opinions and the accuracy of professionals predicting users wants and needs. For example, a study by Absher, McAvoy, Burdge, and Gramann (1988) suggested that professionals were able to predict general preferences and perceptions, but were less accurate with specific management issues in the community. Manning and Fraysier (1989) suggested that experts tended to have a more coordinative, institutional view of community services, where the general public tended to have a greater exchange or production/consumption orientation. Both expert and participant perspectives were seen to be valuable and vital in the planning and decision making process (Manning & Fraysier).

A second area that has received research attention is that of needs assessments. Within a planning context, need assessments are “the identification of states of deprivation and those things (i.e. programs, facilities) that reduce or eliminate expressed

states of deprivation as they relate to recreation” (Knap & Propst, 2001, p. 63). A need is the gap between what is considered necessary and what actually is (Nogradi, 1980). In theory, a recreation plan will match community and individual needs, with financial and other means. Reid (1985) suggested that there are two issues with this assumption: 1) that the definition of ‘need’ can be agreed upon in a community and, 2) once need is defined that it can be measured? He argued that when using needs assessment as a research technique the notion of community ‘need’ must be clearly articulated. Nogradi claimed that needs assessment were an often neglected or misunderstood step of planning. In a content analysis of twenty-one culture and recreation plans, Reid identified needs assessment variables as social welfare, social development, supply, shopping list, present demand, future demand, and standards. The results showed no consistent amount of effort spent in assessing needs. "Present demand" was shown to receive the most attention from planners, when determining the community’s future related to leisure services, thus producing more of the same thing and maintaining status quo (Reid). The term needs assessment has moved off the radar in recreation planning literature and perhaps has been replaced by terms such as leisure inventory, background or community research, or background analysis, as the first step in planning.

Another area that has received attention in research, is the benefits of public involvement in planning. Participants themselves can be affected by participating in the planning process. In a study of a healthy communities initiative, Arai and Pedlar (1997), found a number of benefits associated with the citizens participation in the project. The benefits were organized into five categories: developing new skills, becoming more vocal, balance and renewal, group accomplishment and the ability to influence change

and the development of community. Participation was linked to improvements in their health and personal lives as they created relationships with each other. The development of community was attributed to “(a) the opportunity for shared learning between a variety of people, (b) the development of camaraderie and feeling connected to community, (c) the opportunity to contribute to community, and (d) the enhancement of individuals' knowledge about community and connection with different parts of the community” (Arai & Pedlar, p. 172).

The purpose and benefits of recreation planning has received some attention in the literature as well. For example, Wegner (2005) suggested, a valuable outcome of recreation planning is constituent support for leisure services and development. For example, a planning process that includes the meaningful involvement of residents can build confidence in the recreation department's commitment to the community. Residents who feel their needs and interests are reflected in the recreation plan are less likely to contest its implementation. With residents supporting the recreation department it is hopeful that financial support will follow.

Furthermore Wegner (2005) suggested a well-conceived plan provides evidence that financial resources will be spent wisely, because, planning provides a recreation department with the rationale needed to gain financial support of projects. In the province of Ontario, recreation services are primarily the responsibility of municipal government and therefore funding requires the approval of city council. In the competition for funds, with other services such as police or transportation, a plan provides a competitive advantage (Wegner). A recreation plan also provides a competitive advantage when

applying to Provincial and Federal granting agencies such as the Trillium Foundation in Ontario.

A further purpose of recreation planning is the identification of leisure trends and strategies of addressing them. Certainly one of the most pressing trends influencing municipal recreation is the changing demographics of Canadian communities. The aging population of baby boomers, smaller families and the growing numbers of immigrants are dramatically changing the demands for recreation services (Karlis, 2004). There is also a greater emphasis on the environment and sustainability, a sector that recreation departments have the ability to influence through programs and policy change. The changing definition of health and the greater focus on health and active living has also influenced leisure services. Recreation planning can assist communities in identifying trends that are priorities in their community and help focus services in a way to address them.

Lastly, planning provides a framework for assessment and evaluation of services. A plan provides priority actions and measurable objectives that can provide benchmarks for evaluation (Wegner, 2005). As government changes and staff come and go a recreation plan remains in place to provide a framework to work from and a consistent set of actions. These actions can be evaluated and provide a consistent base for future planning efforts.

The final area that has received research attention is the content of recreation plans. In 1985, Getz, Graham, Payne and June completed an evaluation of forty-six master recreation plans in Ontario, which at that time were a recent development in municipalities. They found that the majority of the plans studied had a

provision/development orientation and only a few of the larger municipalities focused on management and organizational issues that would provide a comprehensive plan.

Following a detailed content analysis they offered the following recommendations. To improve the content of the plans, they suggested greater comprehensiveness, particularly in the area of arts and culture, less reliance on consultants and a management versus provision oriented plan (Getz et al.). To improve the overall planning process they recommended a community committee should assume responsibility for plan development rather than a consultant. Furthermore, they argued that ongoing implementation required permanent public input along with permanent monitoring and evaluation.

In 2006, Eagles and Gebhart (in press) analyzed the content of 25 recreation plans in the Province of Ontario. Their research revealed that there was wide variation in the form, function, content and planning processes in Ontario municipalities. They attributed this variation to a lack of provincial policy or guideline directing the preparation and content of plans. New facility development was a major focus of the plans studies. The plans revealed a low level of shared planning and service delivery amongst municipalities, conservation authorities, provincial parks, and national parks. Similar to what Getz et al. found in 1985, Eagles and Gebhardt found, that there was little attention given to ecological issues, despite the fact that ecological constraint mapping is now a major source of parkland acquisition. They found that most plans did not include cultural and historical policies, which appeared to be the result of a narrow view of the scope of recreation planning. As mentioned earlier, space standards was one of the first methods of recreation planning, the findings of this study found that the use of standards varied dramatically, from exhaustive use of standards to very little use.

Plan Implementation

With the exception of a few recent studies the body of research regarding implementation in the planning literature is small, however the literature on policy implementation is well developed in the fields of public administration and political science (Laurian et al., 2004). The literature from the political science and public administration fields informs planning literature conceptually and will be introduced, followed by an examination of the developing body of implementation specific to planning. With its unique spatial and physical considerations there is a need for implementation research specific to the planning field (Talen, 1996b).

The implementation of recreation plans was recently studied by Eagles and Gebhardt (in press). In a review of municipal plans in Ontario, factors influencing the development and implementation of strategic planning were identified. These included the attitude and support the recreation department staff. They argued that managers who were professionally or university-trained were more likely to understand and support strategic planning. As well they found that plans that were approved by municipal council were much more likely to be implemented. They found that many of the plans assumed that the recreation department had sufficient capability to implement the plan on its own. The plans rarely referenced cooperation with other municipal departments. They noted one case where the lack of reference to the local transportation plan in left parkland without access to transit routes. Furthermore, they noted a lack of reference to financial plans, which sometimes led to insufficient financial resources to implement the plans (Eagles & Gebhardt).

The first generation of implementation research in the fields of public administration and political science followed Pressman's and Wildavsky's (1973) groundbreaking book *Implementation* (Goggin, Bowman, Lester, & O'Toole, 1990). Many of these studies were detailed accounts of how a single authoritative decision was put into action. This first wave of literature is credited with shifting the focus away from how a bill becomes law to how a law becomes a program and highlighting the complex and dynamic nature of implementation (Goggin et al.). During the 1990's, the second generation of research developed analytical frameworks to guide policy implementation research. Although the breakdown of categories varied among scholars these second generation studies focused in large part on the same set of predictor variables, including the policy form and content, the organization and their resources, and the people (their talent, motives, predispositions and interpersonal relationships) (Goggin et al.). A few studies also saw the decision-making environments as a condition of implementation.

In the planning field, an area that has only recently begun to receive attention is the development of criteria to evaluate plan implementation success. Without methods to empirically evaluate plan implementation, the success or failure of plans are assessed impressionistically (Laurian et al., 2004). The planning literature to date identifies the following determinants of plan implementation: quality of the plan, capacity of the planning agency, awareness building, and political context (Berke et al., 2006; Laurian et al., 2004). Plan quality is the idea that the planning process has produced a "good plan". In which issues are clearly identified, there is a strong fact base to guide decisions, there is consistency among policies and goals, and it identifies methods to evaluate success (Berke et al., ; Dalton & Burby, 1994). The capacity of the planning agency refers to the

ability and readiness of the organization to implement the plan. Awareness-building refers to dialogue regarding the issues and how plans, their goals and policies will be addressed (Berke et al.). The political context refers mainly to the government politics, such as the influence of municipal council, but also includes private business and resident interests that can potentially influence the success of plan implementation. In other words successful plan implementation is more likely when there is a good plan, high organizational capacity, high public awareness and a supportive political environment. Each factor is explored in more detail in the following sections.

Plan Quality

Plan quality is the idea that the planning process has produced a “good plan”. Key characteristics of good plans identified by Berke et al. (2006) are: (1) a clear identification of community issues; (2) a strong fact base that identifies and provides evidence for the development of policies; (3) consistency among issues, goals, objectives and policies; and (4) methods track how well objectives and goals are achieved. Plan quality has been empirically identified as a determinant of plan implementation (Berke et al., 2006; Dalton & Burby, 1994). In sum, “good plans” have clear locally appropriate goals based on a strong fact base and include an evaluation or measure of success. Clear identification of issues important to the community can be achieved through comprehensive public involvement strategies. Involving the public in recreation planning can help develop locally appropriate plans that reflect the unique needs of that community, which may lead to greater support of the plan and support of implementing the plans initiatives (Newman, Barnes, Knops, & Sullivan, 2003). Implementing a plan that has had little no public involvement can be difficult if it means creating major

change. Public opposition can slow the implementation process down, so being proactive with public involvement from the onset can ensure an efficient implementation, which may be more cost effective in the end.

Current participation methods, such as public consultations or appearing before city council, may involve the public to an extent but are often what Arnstein (1969) would have referred to as tokenism, rather than any form of citizen power. These types of involvement may involve some level of compromise, but more often involve citizens arguing for or against policies or plans that have already been developed. Ultimately those in power, such as city council, will make a decision whether to accept or deny the project. Such practices force citizens to speak of the issues in polarizing terms, to get their points across (Booher & Innes, 2000). Where there may have been room for compromise or consensus the current system does not allow for open dialogue. Officials and decision makers are forced to choose a side, creating a competitive, rather than collaborative atmosphere. Merely having voices in the planning process is insufficient to achieve strong participative approaches (Davies, 2001). There is a need for understanding how the process will work and how each voice can be heard and incorporated.

Public Involvement in Recreation Planning

In a study into the consistency between the theory and practice of public participation in recreation planning Reid (2001/2002) discovered that generally recreation planners are committed to engaging citizens in the planning process. Participation was typically found during research into the behaviour, needs and satisfaction with current leisure services. Three recreation plans from Ontario communities were analysed for the theoretical approaches to information gathering and how that orientation may have

influenced recommendations for future action (Reid). Additionally the consultants who undertook each plan along with community recreation directors from each community were interviewed. Each plan studied gathered information from the community in some manner. The participants were asked about their intentions for research methods used and were asked to place their methods on Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969). Public involvement methods used by these communities included such things as telephone surveys, interviews with key informants, focus groups with stakeholder groups, surveys of leisure service providers and open public meetings.

Much of the participation Reid (2001/2002) discovered in Ontario leisure plans was of a quantitative nature relating to supply and demand. He argues the methods planners are using fall into the technical and practical traditions of public participation and that a shift to more critical-emancipatory approaches would lead to creative alternatives and force communities to move beyond the status quo. There may be a place for leisure planners and practitioners to take techniques used by leisure researchers and adopt them within community planning settings. Reid argues many of the methods associated with qualitative research paradigms actually involve varying levels of participatory behaviour. Methods such as participatory action research and action learning rely heavily on participation at the core of the methods activities. Reid also suggests much of what is considered interpretivism and constructivism, which rely on the concept of "subject as knower", also involve some level of participation. Moving to a more critical-emancipatory approach to planning changes the power relationships in the leisure system, where the system is no longer reliant on the leisure professional. Instead,

the participant is involved in both the development and consumption of leisure, which Reid argues defines the totality of a leisure activity.

Involving the public in the planning process appears to be beneficial to both the participants and the community at large. So, why is the public not involved in all planning and decision-making processes? As Carver (2001) suggests the recent interest in public involvement in decision making processes is based on two assumptions. For one this interest is based on the assumption that the general public wants to be more closely involved in decision making and two perhaps more concerning is the assumption that those in power actually value and will therefore utilize the public's input.

Once public involvement becomes a priority of a community there are still challenges of putting this into action. Embedded in the process of planning are value judgements. Issues such as what types of programs or developments to implement or who should be involved in the process and when can cause conflict among participants as these issues are often closely aligned with ones values (Davies, 2001). Value differences between individuals often account for their inability to achieve agreement in group problem solving situations (Sanoff, 2000). A framework for dealing with such conflict should be agreed upon early in the process. This often involves discussing both compromise and consensus. Compromising suggests that parties must give something up in order to agree. Consensus on the other hand allows for parties to feel they are all in agreement, without having to feel like they have lost something in the process. Consensus involves mutual learning and respect while coming together with a shared solution to possible conflict.

Plan Evaluation

Beyond a comprehensive public involvement strategy, a good plan will include provisions to track how well objectives and goals are achieved (Berke et al., 2006). Talen (1996a), in a study of accessibility to park land after plan implementation found that without knowing how the plan was meant to be measured it was hard to determine whether the implementation was a success (Talen). To evaluate plan implementation Berke et al. (2006) defined success using two separate approaches. The conformance approach defined success in terms of the degree to which decision-making conforms to the original plan. In their study of permit applications in New Zealand, conformance to the plan meant that permits were only accepted if they followed the policies in the plan. The performance approach however, did not evaluate whether the exact policies set out in the plan were achieved but rather asked; “do the decisions help the community meet the overall goals outlined in the plan?” When plans were defined and measured in terms of conformance, plans and planners were more influential during implementation than when plans were defined and measured in terms of performance (Berke et al.). The authors also found that the only significant factor influencing plan implementation was the “deterrence enforcement” style, which was seen when plans were defined and measured on conformance. A deterrence enforcement style relied on strict interpretations of policies, legalistic procedures and formal written communication rather than informal verbal communication and a flexible interpretation of the policies found in a more facilitative enforcement style (Berke et al.).

Capacity of the Planning Agency

Empirically, the capacity of the agency and its commitment to the plan have been shown to impact plan implementation (Laurian et al., 2004). Berke et al. (2006) measured

staff capacity as the number of planners per capita. Increased capacity meant more staff were available to process the plan and more attention is given to explanation of plan policies. Partners in the plan implementation such as private investors and community residents are given more information regarding the plan and assistance in meeting the plans goals (Berke et al.).

Similarly, Reid (1989) found that a shortage of experienced staff and available funds inhibited the implementation of a senior level government policy at the local level. Specifically, he argued that volunteers in smaller communities may not be able to organize services that correlate to the senior level policy due to lack of experience and lack of funding. Although funding was cited as a concern, respondents in Reid's study made it clear that implementation was a "matter of will, not money" (Reid, 1989, p. 10). Furthermore, in a study of state planning mandates Dalton and Burby (1994) found that implementation was more directly associated with the commitment of the planning agency to the plan than it was to their resources. Both the planning agencies capacity to implement the plan, and its commitment to implementation will impact the success of implementation.

Public Support

The third factor that can influence the implementation of a recreation plan is the support of the public. Public support for a plan is often a benefit of effective public involvement throughout the process but as Filion (1996) argued, residents in principle accept planning initiatives until it will change their lifestyle. In a content analysis of Toronto newspapers, Filion found that the interests of residents often presented obstacles to implementation. Resident opposition often came in the form of 'not in my back yard'

(NIMBYism). There seemed to be a contradiction between what residents said, they valued such as the environment and high-density neighbourhoods and what their actions said such as purchasing single-family homes in neighbourhoods dependant on car travel (Filion).

The support of the public is often a result of a 'good' plan that reflects the needs of the local community. In addition to a good plan, public support means the public is first aware of the plan. Awareness building refers to dialogue regarding local issues and how plans, their goals and policies will address them (Berke et al., 2006). Awareness building can foster more certainty and greater trust in the plan and process. Local awareness building creates the potential for residents to expand their understanding and integrate new knowledge and better solutions that address the important issues outlined in the plan (Berke et al.). With a supporting and knowledgeable public, initiatives from outside the recreation department can help meet goals outlined in the plan.

Political Context

A fourth factor influencing successful plan implementation is the context or implementation environment. The political context discussed here involves the interests of both government and private business. Recreation plan implementation occurs within the broader municipal environment. External factors can influence the progress of implementation. Municipal governments must balance the interests of residents, private businesses and other departments such as police and transportation services. Planning tends to be a proactive approach whereas municipal governments tend to work in a reactive mode, responding to issues and problems when they become crisis (Lieber & Fesenmaier, 1983). The political context can be a catalyst for implementation if there is a

strong political will for planning initiatives. However, implementation can be stalled considerably through blocked permits, or budget decisions when there is opposition to initiatives.

For example, in a study of transportation plans in Bangkok, Daniere (1995) found that despite available funding and a number of plans available, implementation was stalled. Daniere found institutional obstacles external to the planning agency such as acquiring land, bidding procedures, and political barriers blocked implementation. He argued that the attitude of the officials directly affected the community's attitude towards the plan. It was the degree (or lack) of political leadership that hindered implementation the greatest (Daniere). Furthermore, Filion (1996) identified the lack of regional cooperation as an obstacle to implementation. Provincial or federal guidelines dictate municipal policy and vice versa. These intergovernmental relationships can be a catalyst for implementation if policies are consistent but can place bureaucratic barriers as well. Businesses who are looking to build something that does not conform to the plan will call on their legal and political resources to remove planning policies in the way of profit (Filion).

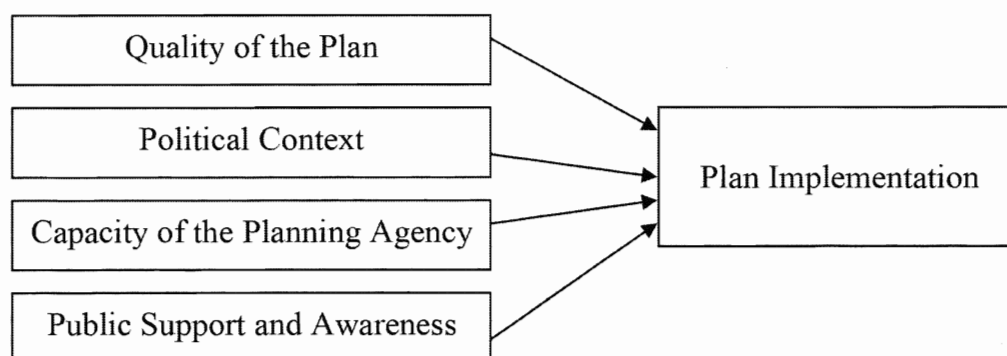


Figure 1. Factors of Plan Implementation

Summary

Many municipal recreation departments make a significant investment to develop a plan to guide recreation provisioning into the future. However, only with effective implementation can the benefits of this process be realized. With the exception of a few recent studies, the body of research into recreation plan implementation is small. Therefore, this report reviewed literature from planning, public administration, and political science, where plan implementation is given more attention. This literature identified four key factors influencing plan implementation (summarized in Figure 1): (1) the quality of the plan; (2) the capacity of the agency; (2) public support; and (4) the political context (Berke et al., 2006; Laurian et al., 2004). As the visual model illustrates, the literature conceptualizes the relationship between these factors and implementation to be linear, and with little interaction or differential valuing among factors. In some ways, this linear representation is in contrast to the literature that highlights the difference between the traditional, rational planning process that occurs in theory and the political planning process taking place in communities. Planning is influenced by both public support and resistance and by the government politics such as the approval of municipal

council. The implementation of recreation plans needs further investigation. It is unclear how the factors of implementation found in the planning, public administration and political science literature impact recreation plans.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors influencing municipal recreation plan implementation. This study took a multi-site case study approach. Case studies are an exploration of a “bounded system” or a case. A case is a specific and unique program, event, activity, individual or phenomenon that is bounded by time and place (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995). Case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” and “why” questions are being asked and when the situation and relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated by the researcher (Yin, 1994). When the purpose of a case study is to understand the uniqueness of a particular case, Stake refers to this as an intrinsic case study. Further, when cases are used to provide insight into an issue or phenomenon, Stake refers to them as an instrumental case study. This study was an instrumental case study, as the purpose was to provide insight into the field of recreation planning, using the cases to explore this process (Stake). Furthermore, because this study investigated three municipal planning processes, each informing the research questions, this was a multi-site study (Stake).

Case studies are one form of qualitative or naturalistic research, characterized by occurring in a natural setting, whereby the researcher is the instrument of data collection. Data collected is in the form of words or pictures and data is analyzed inductively in order to generate understanding (Creswell, 1998). The researcher is argued to be the only instrument flexible and responsive enough to capture the complex and dynamic human experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Case studies, like other qualitative approaches to inquiry, typically involve multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, audio-visual material and documents that lead to the holistic picture presented

(Creswell, 1998). Along with biography, phenomenology, grounded theory and ethnography, a case study presents a holistic and complex picture of real life situations (Creswell). Case studies seek to understand a phenomenon further; multi-site case studies seek to understand how that phenomenon operates under different conditions. Data analysis and reporting in multi-site case research first requires an integrated and holistic comprehension of each case (Stake, p. 31). The final report should aim to display the unique vitality of each case, its particular situation and how the context influences the experience of this case (Stake). Comparison among cases further deepens understanding of the unique situations of each case.

Setting

The cases in this study were chosen purposively as the opportunity to learn was of primary importance (Stake, 1995). In this study, which focused on understanding the recreation planning and implementation process, the cases chosen were three municipalities, who had each recently developed, and were in the early stages of implementing a recreation plan for their municipal parks and recreation departments. Because these three municipalities had recently completed a similar planning process, they provided a unique opportunity to compare the influence of the various factors affecting plan implementation. Table 1 outlines the populations of the communities, along with the title of the plan and key dates of the planning process. The criteria used during case selection were: (1) that the plans were completed in the last three years, (2) that the planning process involved the support of an outside planning consultant, and (3) that the municipality was in reasonable proximity and I was able to gain access to informants.

Table 1. Profile of the Case Study Sites

Municipality	Population	Title of Project	Key Dates of Planning Process
Placeville	48 000	Park, Recreation and Culture Plan	October 4 th , 2005 City council accepts proposal from consultant to begin process. October 3 rd , 2006 Final plan presented to and accepted by council.
Parkertown	78 000	Strategic Plan for the Provision of Parks, Recreation and Culture	September 1 st , 2005 Consultant met with community steering committee. January 8 th , 2007 Final plan presented to and accepted by city council.
Metropolis	165 000	Parks, Recreation, Culture and Libraries Master Plan	September, 2004 an initial meeting of project steering committee. June, 2006 final plan presented and accepted by council.

Gaining Access

Paramount to the success of this study was the cooperation of the three municipal recreation departments. The researcher obtained endorsement from each municipality as a first step in the research process. As a starting point, the senior parks and recreation staff person in each municipality was contacted through a letter of invitation (Appendix A). This letter included information related to why their community was chosen, the resources or time that was being asked of their staff, how the results would be reported, and a description of the anticipated benefits of the study. As well, the director was informed of the precautions planned to assure confidentiality.

Because communities may have been hesitant to participate if they felt they would be compared to the other municipalities for the purpose of judgment, I made it clear to

the municipalities that the purpose of this study was to understand the process of implementing a recreation plan, not to compare the cities. As well, it was made clear that the municipalities would not be named in the findings or publication of the study. Rather, pseudonyms for the communities were created and used. Clear letters of invitation, outlining the research questions, and an open dialogue with participants were effective tools in addressing these concerns.

Following endorsement from the municipality, the next step was to gain access to informed research participants. Again, the senior parks and recreation staff (ie. Director of Parks and Recreation) for each municipality acted as a gatekeeper. Participants were given a letter of invitation outlining the purpose of the study and their role (Appendix B). As well, they were given an informed consent form (Appendix C), which informed participants that their participation was voluntary, how the results were to be reported and any anticipated benefits of the study. As well, the informed consent form ensured participants confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms in reporting.

Data Collection

In line with most case studies, this study used a combination of data collection strategies. Ultimately, the choice of data collection strategies in any study are guided by the research questions, but these choices are also subject to constraints in time, financial resources and access (Meyer, 2001; Yin, 1994). To address the questions posed for this study a thorough document analysis was completed and in-depth interviews were conducted with eleven key informants involved in the development of and implementation of the recreation plan from each of the three municipalities. A detailed

description of the data collection strategies informing each research question is provided later in this chapter.

Documents

As Prior (2004) suggests “how documents place things, how they make things visible, and how such systems of visibility are tied to social practices can form a guiding theme for social research” (p. 80). Documents can highlight the value and importance an organization places on policies or initiatives. The document analysis for this study allowed the researcher to compare official statements found in public documents (i.e. the recreation plans) with what was actually happening in the community (Patton, 2002). Many of the documents of interest were available to the researcher in public forums and accessible through online databases or through the clerk’s office in each municipality.

Although documents are a valuable source of information, like other forms of qualitative methods, they have limitations (Loizos, 2000). Documents are not above manipulation such as distorted recordings or removal of information. Documents are never more than a representation of a more complex situation. To address this, the researcher collected documents from a variety of sources as well as interviewed key informants to provide another source of information. Another limitation of document analysis was that official documents may have contained language or jargon that was unfamiliar to the researcher, making interpretation and analysis difficult. The researcher remained connected to the literature in order to be educated on the planning process and planning language. As well, interview participants were a valuable source for clarifying issues. The final limitation was access to documents. The gatekeeper may have chosen to withhold documents that are not public domain, which could not be avoided.

In-Depth Interviews

To verify and expand on the findings from the document analysis, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants involved in the implementation process of each municipality. The purpose of in-depth interviewing is to provide an entrance point to the perspective of another person. Interviews can provide meaningful and informed viewpoints that often clarify a case (Patton, 2002). In-depth interviews were conducted with the recreation director in each of the three municipalities (3), the planning consultant involved in each process, a steering committee member from each municipality (3), a city councillor (1), and a planning advisor involved with two of the plan (1). Building trust and rapport is one component of a successful interview, along with the interview approach taken. Rapport is built by the interest a researcher shows in what respondents have to say and valuing their perspectives (Glesne, 1999). Having detailed background knowledge of the recreation plans, and the community itself, allowed for a comfortable and informal conversation which helped to build the trusting relationship and rapport needed for a formal interview.

Patton (2002) identified three possible approaches to in-depth interviewing, the informal conversation, the general interview guide approach and the standardized open-ended interview. For this study, the benefits and comfort of a structured interview outweighed the free form and creativity of informal conversational interviews. A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix D) was used to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry were explored with each person and across each case. The interview guide outlined a set of issues to be explored with each respondent, but left room to pursue topics introduced by the participants (Patton). The semi-structured guide made effective

use of time (both the researchers and the interviewee) as it was structured enough to move through important topics and yet remained free to build a conversation where the participants interests and knowledge were most present. The questions were less about the interviewee and more about the plan and planning process. The researcher needed to know a little about the interviewee to understand his or her perspective but paramount was the information pertaining to the planning process and implementation (Stake, 2006).

Choosing a location and time for the interview can further help create a comfortable and conversational atmosphere. The researcher tried to find places and times that were both convenient and appropriate (Glesne, 1999). It was important to respect the respondent's needs in terms of location and time, however interviews should take place in a relatively quiet and private location. Interviews for this study took place in a time and place that were convenient to the participant, such as their office or a coffee shop and took from 30 minutes to one hour. As Glesne suggests, after an hour of steady talk, diminishing returns set in for both the researcher and the participant. As well, some interviews were conducted over the phone, as this was most convenient for participants. Participants were asked and all agreed to have the interview tape-recorded and the researcher took notes throughout. The tape provided a record of what was said and allowed the researchers attention to focus on listening (Glesne, 2006). The researcher transcribed the tape following each interview.

Data Collection to Inform Research Questions

This study involved the collection of data from a variety of print sources and key informants. Each research question is addressed below with the corresponding data collection methods used. Different data was collected for each research question, as they

informed a different aspect of the planning or implementation process. Moreover, the researcher remained open to further data sources that emerged during the research process.

Question 1 - What was the planning process for the three municipalities? To what degree did the extent of implementation in each municipality correlate to what was outlined in the plan?

Documents that addressed this research question were a) local newspaper articles, and b) the final plan document.

- a) Articles from local newspapers were collected and analysed from key dates in the planning process. The papers were searched on the day of and day after, the call for proposal, city council's acceptance of a proposal, public involvement events, city councils acceptance of the final plan and city council budget meetings following plan acceptance. The newspaper articles helped understand the process each community underwent when developing their plan, along with dialogue regarding implementation in the community.
- b) The final plan documents were reviewed as they outlined the implementation priorities. The priorities outlined in the plan were compared to what was actually happening in the community.

The primary informants for this question were:

- a) The recreation director from each municipality. These informants were highly informed of the planning process that took place as well as the implementation of the plan to date. They were also informed of any future implementation actions that are in the proposal stage (see interview guide in Appendix D).

Interviewees that provided supplemental information regarding the planning process and the implementation included:

- a) The planning consultant involved with each planning process as they were highly informed of the process and context of the plan development.
- b) The third key informant was a city councillor who had been involved in the planning and implementation of the Parkertown plan and informed of the factors of implementation in each community. This informant was identified through the document analysis as someone who was present at events and involved in dialogue regarding the plan and its implementation.
- c) The final key informant was a member of the plan steering committee from each municipality. This was a member of the community in Placeville, a finance manager in Metropolis and a recreation staff person in Parkertown. These informants were informed of the planning process that took and had information about the implementation.

Question 2 - What factors have influenced plan implementation in each of the three municipalities?

Question 2a) How has the quality of the plan (i.e. clear goals and locally appropriate priorities) influenced plan implementation?

Using criteria from the planning literature each of the three plans were assessed based on whether issues were clearly identified and locally appropriate, if there was a strong fact base to guide decisions, whether there was consistency among policies and goals, and if it identified methods to evaluate success (Berke et al., 2006; Dalton &

Burby, 1994). To inform the researcher of the quality of the plan, the final plan document were analyzed and interviews were conducted with the following.

- a) The recreation director of each municipality was informed of the plan contents, how the plan was developed and if the quality of the plan had achieved its success in being implemented. Two of the three recreation directors interviewed were not involved throughout the duration of the planning process. They came on during implementation or when draft of plan was already complete.
- b) The planning consultant for each process was heavily involved in the creation of the plan document. They were informed of the public involvement strategies used during the development of the plan. They were able to speak to how this involvement influenced decision making throughout plan development and how final decisions were made.
- c) The steering committee members were informed of the planning process, public involvement strategies and the decision-making processes. They were able to speak to the how well the plan reflected the local community.

Question 2b) - How has the capacity of the recreation department (ie. staff capacity, commitment to planning process) influenced plan implementation?

The primary source of data collection for this question was an interview with:

- a) The recreation director of each municipality. Questions pertained to the number of staff and staff hours dedicated to plan implementation, the expertise of staff with regards to plan implementation and the commitment of the department to achieve implementation.

Question 2c) - How has public support of the plan influenced plan implementation (in terms of a political will for implementing planning initiatives)?

Similar to question 2b the main source of data collection for this question was interviews. Interviewees that helped inform the researcher of the role public support has had on implementation were:

- a) The recreation directors were asked questions such as: How has the community received the plan, and were members of the public participating in implementation?
- b) The Parkertown city councillor was asked to discuss the role the general public had played in implementation. Questions such as: Are residents calling about planning initiatives? Has there been any opposition? Have private investors shown an interest in initiatives outlined in the plan?
- c) The members of the steering committees were informed of the public support throughout the plan development. Furthermore, as a member of the community they were informed of the impact this support has had on implementation.

Question 2d) - How has the broader political context influenced plan implementation?

This question was addressed through both document analysis and in-depth interviews. Documents that informed the researcher of the political context were:

- a) Newspaper articles and editorials. The papers were searched on the day of and day after, the call for proposal, city councils acceptance of a proposal, public involvement events, city councils acceptance of the final plan and

city council budget meetings following plan acceptance. The articles in the newspapers and editorials illuminated the dialogue among residents regarding the plan and its initiatives.

Interviewees that helped the researcher understand the broader political context were asked to discuss the context of the planning and implementation in their municipality.

- a) The recreation directors offered the researcher information regarding the political environment of municipal government and the role of recreation.
- b) The city councillor was specifically knowledgeable about the context and influence of regional government, existing planning or tourism policies, and the interests of private businesses.
- c) The steering committee members were informed of the community context, the interests and dialogue among residents as well as the role the municipal government, or private businesses has played in getting the plan implemented.

Question 3: What have the relationships been between these factors in each of the three municipalities and how have these relationships impacted implementation?

Although specific data was not collected for this question, this question was addressed during data analysis.

Data Analysis

This study aimed to understand the factors influencing municipal recreation plan implementation. Both the similarities and differences of implementation across manifestations informed the study (Stake, 2006). Each case was used to gain an

understanding of the municipality's recreation planning process, as it was situated in local conditions. It was hoped that the complex process of recreation planning could be understood better by looking at the particularities of each case and its context (Stake).

The goal of data analysis for this study was to understand more about the recreation planning and implementation process and to describe what was learned, with minimal interpretation (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The constant comparative method of data analysis presented by Maykut and Morehouse was the basis for the analysis of the three cases. The constant comparative method of data analysis combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As each new unit of meaning emerged it is compared to all other units of meaning and categorized. Inductive approaches to data analysis are a defining characteristic of qualitative research, and the constant comparative method provides a rigorous and systematic method of inductively developing propositions or statement of facts from the data (Maykut & Morehouse).

Data analysis for this study began by unitizing the data set (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unitizing the data involved identifying and coding chunks or "units of meaning" found in the interview transcripts (i.e. departmental challenges relating to skills and turnover in staff). With the constant comparative method of data analysis this inductive coding was done in combination with the simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning, across the three cases (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Each new unit of meaning was compared to all previous units and categorized or coded with similar units of meaning, such that 'like is categorized with like.' When there were no 'like' units of meaning, a new category was created. This provided continuous refinement of initial

categories, as they could be changed, merged, or omitted as new categories and units of meaning were found (Maykut & Morehouse). As categories became refined, a propositional statement was generated that conveyed the meaning contained in the data and became a “rule of inclusion” for future units of meaning (Maykut & Morehouse) (i.e. organizational review – job descriptions/mandates/portfolios/staff capacity). The propositional statements (i.e. need for organizational change) were then examined for possible connections and relationships among each other. These statements informed the ‘factors of implementation’ presented in the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations began in the design stage of the study and were at the forefront of decision-making throughout the research process (Glesne, 1999). Ethical considerations in this study included participant’s informed consent, confidentiality and reciprocity.

Informed consent involves making the intentions of the research clear to participants, so they can make informed decisions about participation (Glesne, 1999). To ensure this occurred, written informed consent forms (Appendix C) were provided to and signed by the participants before interviews took place began. The forms informed participants that their participation was voluntary, there were no ill effects associated with participation and withdrawing from study at any point was their right (Glesne). Furthermore, participants were assured confidentiality through the use of individual pseudonyms in reporting. As well, due to the unique nature of the participant’s positions within their municipality (i.e. recreation director), and to protect the confidentiality of the community as a whole, each municipality has been given a pseudonym.

Reciprocity is the exchange of something of value between researcher and participant. Participants provided the researcher with something of great value (their experience and perspective) and to show that their words are valued, the researcher offered something in return for their information (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002). As with much qualitative research the information the participants provided in this study was invaluable and finding something of reciprocal value was difficult. What I do have to offer is the means to be grateful (Glesne, 1999). I am able to acknowledge how important the participant's time, cooperation and words were. The interviews were an opportunity to listen attentively and give the participants a sense of importance (Glesne). Further efforts toward reciprocity included providing each municipality, and individual participants, a comprehensive report of the study findings as it was anticipated that the information collected and final report would be of value to the participants (Patton, 2002). Executive summaries were also be provided to offer a quick point of reference.

CHAPTER FOUR: DESCRIPTION OF SETTING

The Municipal Recreation Planning Process

The municipal recreation planning process can be prompted by two things: when a previously developed plan expires or when a recreation department is without a plan, and looking for direction and focus in their scope of work. Typically, a municipal recreation department develops a recreation plan with the support of an outside planning consultant. Common practice is to advertise a request for proposal (RFP) through various print and electronic outlets across Ontario. Prospective planners then use the terms of reference to design a process, which is reflective of the terms of reference. From there, steering committees, which typically include a city council representative, and/or recreation staff, use the proposed plans to hire a consultant. The selection process will likely include an interview to allow the consultant and staff/steering committee to meet. Included within the request for proposal is information relating to the amount and type of consultation required (household surveys, community forums), the depth of the research, and the scope of the plan (culture, arts, parks, libraries, policy), as well as budgetary limits. Budgets for a recreation planning process depend on the size of the city, scope of the plan, and depth of research and public involvement requested, but an average range for hiring a planning consultant is \$50 000 to \$150 000. The request for proposal is seen as critical as it sets the tone and focus of the planning process, and ultimately the plan itself.

Once the planning consultant(s) is hired, he or she will develop a work plan outlining the schedule and tasks to complete. Depending on the terms of reference, planning processes can involve such things as community consultation events, interviews

or focus groups with staff, council or stakeholders and written or telephone surveys of community members or private and non-profit leisure service providers. The planning process takes from 6 months to 2 years. Research will also include the collection of demographic information, community and population trends, along with an inventory of leisure facilities and services currently provided. A plan is drafted, and typically those closely involved such as senior staff, steering committee members and the consultant are given the chance to comment and make further recommendations. The final plan draft is presented to the members of city council, who then have the opportunity to make comments and recommendations before accepting it. This is a vital step in the planning process, because if city council identifies problems or recommendations they feel do not fit the community, they will not endorse it. Typically, the endorsement of a recreation plan means council supports the document in principle, but each initiative (i.e. initiatives with budget implications) will be reviewed when they require the funding.

Implementation of a plan can take up to 20 years.

In order to present the unique vitality of each case, it's particular situation and how the context influences the experience of each municipality, each case will be presented separately first (Stake, 2006). A description the municipality, how the planning process began and how implementation is going will be presented. Cross-case findings and analysis will then be presented to deepen the understanding of the unique situations of each case (Stake) .

Case 1: Parkertown

Overview of Municipality

Parkertown was a municipality in Southern Ontario with a population of approximately 78,000 residents. The city was experiencing a large development boom specifically in the tourism sector. In the 2005 Statistics Canada census the median income of all households was \$61,111. The parks, recreation and culture department in Parkertown worked under a community development model, providing only a small number of direct programs. In 2007 Parkertown's budget for Parks, Recreation and Culture was approximately \$8 million. They worked with major partners such as the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club and Coronation 50 Plus to provide leisure services throughout the city. The parks, recreation and culture department had four committees of council who worked with staff on programming, event planning and making reports and recommendations to council. The four committees were parks, recreation, arts and culture, and the trails and bikeways. These committees were made up of residents, staff and council members. They met monthly and were selected during municipal election years. Parks, recreation and culture staff in Parkertown consisted of 20 full time non-union staff, 40 union staff and during the summer approximately 50 students for pools and park maintenance. A few contractors were hired to maintain flowerbeds throughout the city and contractors were hired in the winter months for snow plowing at city facilities.

Plan Initiation

Prior to the development of the Strategic Plan for the Provision of Parks, Recreation and Culture being studied, there were a number of smaller feasibility studies

and plans completed in Parkertown. There was a trails and bikeways plan, a facility feasibility study for a community centre in partnership with the YMCA, a heritage master plan in 2005 and an arena feasibility study was completed in 2002. Each of these processes involved an outside consultant. The department felt there was a need for a global and coordinated perspective of leisure services. A steering committee was formed with members appointed by staff and council from the various existing committees of council. Committees recommended a representative be appointed. The terms of reference for the planning project were drafted primarily by staff and sent to the steering committee for comments. From the terms of reference, a request for proposal for the strategic plan was sent out for tender and closed on May 20th, 2005. The steering committee and staff were involved in interviewing and hiring the successful consulting firm.

Public Involvement

Parkertown embarked on an expert driven planning process. The consultant was hired to make impartial recommendations based on research conducted in the community. The consultant met with the steering committee at key points throughout process to gain input on drafts. The consultant did the bulk of the work during the planning process. The department was quite hands off during this time. The planning process included a variety of public involvement strategies during the research phase, as well in a consultative form when the plan was drafted. Public involvement strategies included:

- A youth Forum hosted by the Mayor's youth advisory council on April 7th, 2005.
- A community forum held on December 1st, 2005.
- A random survey of 400 households.

- A survey of eleven of the eighteen recreation groups.
- A survey of six of the arts and culture groups.
- And the consultant held one on one interviews with key partners and stakeholders in the community such as the YMCA and city councillors.

During the planning process in January 2006 the parks, recreation and culture director retired and a new director took over. The consultant felt this staff change did not have an impact on the planning process as it was expert driven and regardless of the departmental leadership the plan was going to be completed. However, there was a notable change in the approach the new director took with the steering committee. Meetings between the new director and the steering committee were less frequent and drafts were not forwarded to the committee quite as often.

Implementation

The final plan was submitted to the recreation department on January 8th, 2007. The document was then presented and accepted by council. The final plan included 23 action plans that were organized into six major categories. The six categories and action plans are presented here with a summary of the implementation that had taken place.

The Delivery System

1. Define and Foster Department's Role in Community Development.

Although the parks, recreation and culture department in Parkertown has been promoting their model of service delivery as community development, the plan highlighted the need to review their role in community development and redefine this role. As a first step in implementing this recommendation, the department hired a consultant to conduct an educational session with staff on community development. The

goal was to train staff in community development practices and to help them understand their role as facilitators rather than direct programmers.

The department was working on transferring over programs currently run by city staff to more qualified non-governmental partners. This is both inline with their commitment to community development and finding efficiencies in the department. For instance, as the YMCA already trained and supervised staff to work with youth throughout the summer and it was much more efficient to hand over the cities few summer youth programs to the YMCA. They also attempted to bring in more partners, such as the Lions Club when planning special events such Canada Day celebrations and their Santa Clause Parade.

2. Review and Revise Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee Structure

The plan recommended that the four committees of council be amalgamated into one overarching recreation committee, with a more holistic view of the cultural and recreational assets in the community. There was quite a bit of conflict surrounding this recommendation, as it was regarded not as an impartial expert opinion, but rather the personal preference of the new director. This contention coincided with the new approach and less frequent communication between the steering committee and the new director. It should be noted that some committee members sit on more than one committee of council and were also on the plan steering committee. At this point the four committees of council remain. It is difficult for council to support the amalgamation without the public support to do so.

3. Develop Effective Partnerships

With the department relying on partners to provide leisure services and providing financial support to do so, the plan recommended developing consistent policies to evaluate the benefits of such city partnerships. A manager of policy and community development was hired (see #4) in the fall of 2007 and was working on developing new departmental policies regarding partnerships and criteria for receiving and maintaining city grants.

4. Secure Appropriate Staff Resources to Support Service Development and Delivery

The department underwent a great deal of organizational restructuring. Job descriptions were reviewed and where necessary rewritten to better reflect the requirements of that position and the community development mandate. Furthermore, job titles were corrected to reflect the skill set and expertise of staff. For example, landscape tech was changed to landscape architect. Also within this action plan, it was recommended to hire a new Community Development Coordinator for Arts and Culture. This position along with a Manager of Policy and Community Development was approved by council and hired in 2007.

5. Develop Policies to Support Service Delivery

Policies being developed by the new Manager of Policy included a donation policy, a park naming policy, and a zero tolerance policy. As well, they were reviewing operational standards such as how often to cut the grass or water gardens in the parks. Policies were drafted by the manager of policy and taken to the appropriate committee of council for review. Both the committee and manager presented the policy to council. The new manager believed it was important to put forward policies the public had been asking

for such as the zero tolerance policy for city facilities, to gain their trust and buy in to the process before approaching difficult subjects such as user fees.

6. Implement Procedures for Ongoing Planning and Evaluation

Programs and Activities

7. Augment the Current Focus on Organized Sports and Recreation by Expanding

Programming

in Three Key Areas – Active Living, Arts and Culture, Community-building and Special Events.

The plan highlighted that the recreation department had a heavy focus on organized sports. Part of the department organizational restructuring was done to help reorient staff to community development in all leisure services. As well the Community Development Coordinator of Arts and Culture position was created to help expand the department's scope.

Indoor Facilities

8. Prepare Strategy for Developing Community Arts Facilities

9. Prepare Strategy for Augmenting the Supply of Major Indoor Sports and Recreation

Facilities Scheduled Outdoor Playing Fields

10. Develop Improved Procedures for Managing the Existing Supply of Outdoor Playing Fields

11. Identify and Implement a Program for Outdoor Playing Field Upgrades and

Improvements

12. Anticipate Future Needs for Multi-purpose and Artificial Turf Playing Fields

In partnership with a local soccer club, the department built an artificial turf field to be ready for the 2009 season.

13. Determine Role of Sport Tourism in Future Additions or Improvements to Field Supply

Other Outdoor Sport and Recreation Facilities

14. Prepare a Detailed Development Plan for Outdoor Facilities
15. Prepare a Management Plan for Unsupervised Facilities

Parks, Open Space and Trails

16. Preview and Update Park Policies and Standards
17. Develop Strategy for the Securement of Parkland and Open Space
18. Prepare Park Design and Development Standards
19. Develop Planned Program for Parks Upgrading
20. Prepare Park Maintenance and Operational Standards
21. Develop Improved Procedures for Environmental Protection and Park Management Practices

22. Develop Approach for the Integration of City Beautification Initiatives and Working Relationship with the BIAs

23. Continue Implementation of the Master Plan for the Recreational Trail System

The strategic plan in Parkertown was focused primarily on policy development, however there were notable facility developments taking place. The arena feasibility study took place prior to the Strategic Plan and they were moving forward with the construction of a four-pad arena. Construction on the \$37 million project was sent out for tender in Summer 2008. As well, they were working on a park redevelopment where they

will build a splash pad and fully accessible playground in an underutilized city park. This will be the second such redevelopment in the city and they are hoping to use this model as a flagship in advocating for further park development. Implementation of the Parkertown Strategic Plan was on track and the department was moving forward on the initiatives and projects they were able to garner council support for.

Case 2: Metropolis

Overview of Municipality

The second case explored for this research was the largest of the three municipalities. Metropolis is a municipality in the Greater Toronto area in the Province of Ontario. With a population of approximately 165 000 this city was experiencing a great deal of growth. The face of the community had changed considerably from an affluent suburb to a community with “real people with real limitations” (Metropolis Planner). The median income of all households in Metropolis was \$101 675 in the 2005 Statistics Canada census. The community services commission of Metropolis consists of three divisions: parks and open space, recreation and culture and libraries with an annual operating budget of \$29 million.

Plan Initiation

As the community was adjusting to the growth and changes in the population, a new chief administration officer (CAO) for the municipality initiated a series of six planning projects to guide the community into the future. This included such efforts as an environmental strategy, a transportation master plan and the parks, recreation, culture and libraries master plan. Consistent with other planning efforts in Metropolis a steering committee was brought together consisting of three co-chairs from the community

services commission and nine representatives from various municipal departments with the corporation, such as finance, planning and corporate communications. An initial meeting of the project steering committee took place in the summer of 2004. During the request for proposal process, the director of parks and recreation was retiring. The incoming director took over leadership of the process with the outgoing director remaining in an advisory role until the process was underway. Throughout the planning process the various municipal departments, represented on the steering committee, played roles specific to their expertise. For example, the planning department provided the demographic and growth data during the research phase of plan development while the finance department was involved to ensure the plan remain financially realistic. They ensured that projects would meet funding criteria such as provincial legislation related to the use of development dollars on recreation facilities.

Public Involvement

Public consultation in Metropolis took on many forms between 2004 and 2006.

The following is a summary of the consultation and involvement efforts:

- On September 21st, 2004 a community search conference was held with approximately 70 residents. They were asked, in terms of parks, open space, recreation, culture and libraries, what did Metropolis do best? And what could they do better?
- A random telephone survey of 500 households was completed.
- A written survey was mailed to 220 community organizations, partners and user groups.
- A youth survey was distributed to two classes at each Metropolis high-school.

- The consultant conducted one on one interviews with 50 major stakeholders and with each city councillor and the mayor.
- Workshops with staff were conducted and meetings were held with existing advisory boards and committees in the corporation.
- And a public consultation meeting was held in March 2006, to present the final draft and gather comments from residents.

Due to the broad scope of the plan in Metropolis a number of supplemental documents and reports were created around the specific sectors. These documents along with the final plan remained available to the public on the city's website.

- A library space analysis completed on May 6th, 2005 and revised in February 2006.
- A parks, open space and trails analysis was completed on June 8th, 2005 and revised March 14th, 2006.
- A recreation facility analysis (indoor/outdoor) was completed on June 8th, 2005
- And a cultural facilities analysis was completed February 2006.

Implementation

The final plan was submitted to council and approved in principle on June 19th, 2006. Following council's acceptance of the master plan, Metropolis created an implementation document where they took all 163 recommendations and plotted out an action plan. As the director of recreation and culture in Metropolis stated, the master plan gave them the direction to go, and off they went: "Once we got started on this we just haven't stopped". Council placed recreation as a high priority in creating their vision of a "liveable" city and this may have helped facilitate the department's implementation

efforts. The 163 recommendations were catalogued in the following 16 primary needs and actions. A summary of the progress of implementation is outlined here as well.

Parks, Open Space and Trails

1. Continue to obtain sufficient amounts of parkland for passive and active activities.
2. Continue to develop multi-purpose trails and look for opportunities to link the parks system through trails, bike lanes and signage.

Recreation – Indoor

3. Redevelop a former school as a multi-use and multi-generational community centre.

A former high-school owned by the city was being redeveloped into a community centre. An architect was hired to work on the design of the facility in the spring of 2008.

4. Develop multi-use and multi-generational community centre with a variety of recreation and leisure components, including aquatics, ice and appropriate multi-use and dedicated program space.

This was the largest scale project recommended - to develop an indoor/outdoor leisure complex in a high growth area of the city. The complex was in phase one of development in Spring 2008 and would include a four-pad arena (#5), a BMX park (#9), a splash pad, a dog-walking park, six or seven soccer fields and one artificial turf field (#6).

5. Provide and/or facilitate additional indoor ice facilities to meet the needs of the community with youth being the highest priority.

Council had approved the proposal and tenders were currently going out for a four-pad arena to be included in the leisure complex (#4).

Recreation – Outdoor

6. Address the shortage of soccer fields by developing new fields, adding lights to existing fields, installing artificial turf and/or converting under utilized ball diamonds.

To address the need for soccer fields, specifically indoor soccer, the city entered a partnership with a local soccer club to build an indoor soccer facility in the summer of 2008.

7. Utilize surplus of ball diamonds and public tennis courts to accommodate alternative uses.
8. Provide suitable venues for outdoor pleasure skating and shinny, including the development of a Town-wide artificial ice-skating rink and natural/refrigerated community rinks.
9. Place priority on the development on basketball courts and skateboarding facilities in areas with the concentration of youth. BMX is another emerging activity that should be provided for.

Culture

10. Further consider the establishment of a “creativity and innovation” centre downtown to serve various interests, including the arts and cultural community.
11. Consider the needs of the arts and cultural community when designing new multi-use community centres.
12. Undertake improvements to existing infrastructure.
13. Support the arts and culture community through the allocation of equitable staff and financial resources between recreation and culture. And the preparation of a community culture plan.

Consistent with this action, the city conducted a community culture plan that was completed in the fall of 2008. The plan looked at how the city could incorporate culture into everything they did and who the players should be in delivering cultural services, as well as identifying facility needs.

Libraries

14. Plan a system of branch libraries that reflected the needs of the entire town and specific communities, as well as operational efficiencies and realities.
15. Develop new main library in an accessible location in northern part of town.
16. Continue to implement and adjust the libraries extension/outreach services.

In addition to these, the department was working on an event strategy to address the concerns of city run events and create a document outlining the roles of the various departments in holding an event. They were also preparing a Youth Strategy to address the needs of Metropolis youth that should be complete in the summer of 2008. The implementation in Metropolis was moving along well, and at a pace consistent with the plans recommended timelines.

Case 3: Placeville

Overview of Municipality

Placeville is a municipality in Southern Ontario with an approximate population of 50,000. They have a strong history in manufacturing, but similar to other Ontario municipalities, are experiencing economic challenges due to the loss of many of these manufacturers. The median income of all Placeville families in the 2005 Statistics Canada census was \$60,652. The parks and recreation department was responsible for three main functions in the community: the parks division (ie. sports fields, cemeteries

and forestry), the leisure services division (ie. direct programming and special events) and the facilities divisions (ie. playgrounds, swimming pools and arenas). Placeville's 2006 budget for Parks, Facilities and Leisure Services was approximately \$6 million. The Placeville staff team consisted of approximately 41 full time employees, 49 seasonal staff for pools and parks maintenance, 2 contract positions, such as the Tourism Coordinator and 19 casual positions who provided programming on an occasional basis. They also relied on the services of approximately 300 volunteers throughout the year for special events and festivals.

Plan Initiation

A previous master plan for the parks and recreation department was completed in 1982 and had a ten-year lifespan. The need for an updated plan was recognized, and the general manager of parks and recreation was hired because he had experience facilitating a master planning process. City council agreed to establish a steering committee, to guide the city through the planning process, and the process was initiated in 2005. The nine citizen members of the steering committee, which were chosen by staff and council after applying, was established to work with the general manager of parks and recreation, two city councillors, and a representative from the ministry of citizenship and immigration: the culture, sport and recreation board. This was the first time a steering committee was chosen in this manner in Placeville. The steering committee developed the terms of reference for the project and a request for proposal was sent out in the summer of 2005. The initial budget for the planning consultant was \$80 000, but in the eleventh hour, city council agreed to broaden the scope of the project to include "culture" and the budget was increased to \$100 000. July 15th, 2005 was the final day for consultants to submit

bids for the Master Plan of Parks, Recreation and Culture. The steering committee interviewed three planning firms and recommended one firm to council (which was supported).

Public Involvement

In August 2005, the steering committee hosted a media information night to inform the press and residents about the planning process and ways to get involved. The following is a list of the ways the public was encouraged to be involved in the process:

- In November 2005, a search conference was held with approximately 100 residents in attendance. Residents were asked, “What was great,” “what was not so great,” and “what would you like to see in the future?” with regards to the parks and recreation, arts and culture facilities, and programs in Placeville.
- In December 2005, a website was created, to put the master planning process online. Updates on the project were posted along with the findings from the various public involvement events such as the search conference.
- Six mini-forums were held with various user groups in the city such as youth, sports and the arts community.
- A survey was sent out to community and user groups with approximately 50 being completed and returned to the planner.
- A community forum was held in June 2006. This was referred to as the “litmus test” of the plan by the planning consultant. A draft of the plan was sent out to attendees in advance of the evening and input was gathered on “what did you like?” and “what could you not live with?”

Implementation

Following the successful community forum with the support of residents, the final report was submitted to council September 15th, 2006. And on October 5th, 2006 city council accepted the master plan reaffirming the credibility built into the plan through the process taken and engagement of citizens. The approval however, was not unanimous. A few councillors were concerned with the financial implications of approving the plan.

The Parks, Recreation and Culture Master plan outlined nine priorities for the future of parks, recreation and culture: 1) optimize the effectiveness of the city-wide leisure delivery system, 2) strengthen and broaden the role of the parks and recreation department, 3) enhance the development of the arts, 4) increase the role of tourism, 5) optimize the opportunity of the waterway, 6) provide quality parks, public open spaces and trails, 7) complete the planning for and begin first phase of development of new indoor and outdoor facilities, 8) invest in the upgrade and/or expansion of existing public leisure facilities, and 9) continue to protect, enhance and celebrate the city's natural, built and cultural heritage assets. The plan was integrated into the city's corporate strategic plan. Meaning the nine goals of the parks, recreation and culture master plan have become part of the city's overall vision and framework.

The general manager of parks, facilities and leisure services left Placeville in May 2007, seven months into implementation. There was a three-month stretch with no general manager of parks, facilities and leisure services until a new general manager took over the position and the responsibility of plan implementation in September 2007. This stretch left the department struggling to maintain status quo and seemed to have stalled implementation.

With the new general manager in place, a number of recommended advisory committees were formed. These committees were made up of both residents and staff and report to council with updates on implementation progress. The following committees were formed during the fall and winter of 2007/2008: a tourism advisory committee, a sport tourism advisory committee, a seniors advisory committee, an arts and culture advisory committee, a future arenas advisory committee and a seniors expansion advisory committee. Each committee has had at least one meeting (future arenas has met twice). They have been asked to take the recommendations from the master plan and use them to guide the development of the committee's terms of reference (or scope). The general manager hopes to use these committees to update council on what has already been implemented and what is to come in the future.

Reporting to the general manager were three senior managers (leisure services, facilities and parks). They have each been assigned the responsibility of working on the recommendations in the plan. The general manager's copy of the plan has a managers name written along side each objective and action. According to the general manager, council will not be approving any further staff so the responsibility of implementation lies in the hands of current staff. The following section will summarize the nine priorities of the plan and corresponding recommendations, along with a summary of the implementation known to the researcher.

The first priority of the plan was to optimize the effectiveness of the city-wide leisure delivery system. The plan recommended such actions as to seek opportunities for cooperation among service providers, to optimize awareness and promote benefits of

leisure services, to improve system wide planning, and to consider the establishment of a sports council. At this time, none of these recommendations appear to have been fulfilled.

Secondly, to strengthen and broaden the role of the parks and recreation department the plan recommended increasing the department's emphasis and investment in community development. The plan recommended developing a comprehensive philosophy of community and volunteer development. As well, to support this goal, within the first year (2007) a full-time community development coordinator was to be hired. Council, however, did not approve this position in the budget and no coordinator was hired. To further meet this goal of broadening the role of the recreation department, the plan recommended a citizens committee be established to assist with the implementation of the plan and its nine priorities. The citizens committee was to "monitor progress with implementation, report to the community about accomplishments and encourage action regarding implementation". A call was sent out to establish this committee in the local newspaper and when only two people came forward, the committee and this recommendation was not realized. No further effort has been made in establishing this committee. A further objective outlined in the plan was to rename the "Parks and Recreation" Department to better reflect the increasing role in arts, culture and tourism. The department was renamed "Parks, Facilities and Leisure Services".

The third priority was to enhance the development of the arts in Placeville. It was recommended that an art and culture advisory committee be established. The committee was created in the fall of 2007. It was recommended that this committee develop an arts and culture policy for Placeville by 2008, that they investigate the market for an outdoor performance venue immediately and that they investigate the market for an indoor

performance facility and consider an arts and culture council in 2009. Plans for an outdoor amphitheatre were completed, with construction scheduled for the summer of 2008. Did this happen?

As the fourth priority was to increase the role of tourism in Placeville, the plan recommended hiring a tourism coordinator to support the coordination of the industry in 2006. Council approved a one-year contract for the position and a coordinator was hired in 2007. This contract needs re-approval.

The fifth priority was to optimize the opportunity of the Placeville waterway. To do this a long range plan for the waterway was completed including a vision, governing principles, land use and development directions, a marketing strategy, management plan and funding strategy. This plan was completed and approved by council in the Spring of 2008. The plan recommended using the new Tourism Coordinator as a staff resource to the volunteer board of directors. The board of directors hired a business manager for the waterway in 2006, before the completion of the recreation master plan or the waterway plan. The general manager of parks and recreations saw the implementation of recommendations relating to the waterway as the responsibility of this business manager.

The sixth priority of the plan was to provide quality parks, public open spaces and trails. This included such things as expanding recreation trail systems, establishing a trails committee, improvement of neighbourhood parks, participation in communities in bloom and better promotion of parks and their benefits. For example, a city-wide map of all parks and leisure spaces was created during the planning process and it was recommended that this be posted on the cities website and included in the leisure guide. The 2008 Leisure Guide, nor the website had this map. The plan further recommended

creating a high profile welcome sign on the edge of Placeville. Two welcome to Placeville signs were designed with landscaped features at city boundaries in 2007.

Priority number seven was to complete the planning for and begin first phase of development of new indoor and outdoor facilities. The city was moving forward on plans to develop a multi-use leisure complex. A location had been secured and the funding options including possible partnerships were being investigated. One participant believed this was a distraction from the vision of the master plan. They argued that volunteer and community development policies needed to be in place before moving forward with a large-scale project. The director believed that Welland needed a successful project such as this, to “prove” the worth of leisure services and to restore trust in the recreation department. To date, there was no citizens advisory committee involved with this project, although the future arenas advisory committee provided input regarding the inclusion of possible ice pads.

The eighth priority was to invest in the upgrade and/or expansion of existing public leisure facilities. It was recommended that city’s existing senior centre be expanded. A seniors expansion advisory committee was established, and had a first meeting in winter of 2007. The plan also recommended maintaining the city’s two arenas, an arena’s committee has been set up to look into the facilities further and make recommendations regarding upgrades and eventual replacement. This priority also identified the farmers market as needing improvements to the building and experience. City council approved a \$100 000 budget for upgrades to the Market in 2008.

The final priority of the plan was to continue to protect, enhance and celebrate the city’s natural, built and cultural heritage assets. This included recommendations such as

identifying, protecting and promoting resources, sites, and neighbourhood districts. For example, Placeville's French Town had been designated by the city and now had street signs indicating the boundaries of the district.

Implementation in Placeville seemed to have been significantly stalled by the lack of departmental leadership in the summer of 2007. Participants felt the process lost momentum when the implementation committee was not established. The committees that have been established, during implementation, were still young and as yet have achieved little progress. The department was on track with the leisure complex, which may have been due to the support of the Mayor.

CHAPTER FIVE: FACTORS OF PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that influenced the implementation of municipal recreation plans in the communities of Parkertown, Metropolis and Placeville. The findings of the study are useful for practitioners involved in the recreation planning process, as they provide further understanding of the characteristics that lead to plan implementation. Understanding these factors will help practitioners when developing planning processes and approaches to implementation. The findings presented in this chapter can help recreation departments learn how to best use their resources in future planning efforts and how to negotiate the highly political and complex process of plan implementation. The research questions that framed the study were:

- 1) What was the planning process for the three municipalities? To what degree did the extent of implementation in each municipality correlate to what was outlined in the plan?
- 2) What role did the factors of implementation (plan quality, departmental capacity, the political context and public support) play in the implementation of the recreation plan in each of the three municipalities?
- 3) and What relationships existed between these factors in each of the municipalities and how did these connections impact implementation?

To address the research questions, the following chapter will address the findings related to each of the factors that influenced implementation. These are divided into three categories: factors that related to the plan itself, factors related to the recreation department and factors related to the broader implementation context. Each of these

categories begins with a general description of the factor (i.e. a typical departmental make-up), before describing the specific themes found in the data. The final section of this chapter addresses the data that highlighted the relationships and connections between the factors of implementation and how these connections impacted implementation in the three cases.

Factors Related to the Plan

As seen in the three plans described in the case stories for this study, recreation plans can provide a variety of recommendations, in a variety of ways. The scope of a recreation plan depends on the terms of reference and the scope of the department. As seen in the three cases here, the scope and how the recommendations were presented can vary across municipalities. For example, the Parkertown Strategic Plan for the Provision of Parks, Recreation and Culture had 23 action plans, the Metropolis Parks, Recreation, Culture and Libraries Master Plan had 163 recommendations and the Placeville Master Plan for Parks, Recreation and Culture Services was organized into nine priorities.

The following section will present the findings related to the plan document itself. Participants expressed that successful implementation was more likely when 1) the plan addressed the unique characteristics of their community, 2) the department had the expertise and cooperation of other municipal employees, 3) the plan was consistent and integrated with other planning efforts in the city and, 4) the plan fit well with the capacity of the department.

Uniqueness to the Community

Developing a plan that addressed the unique needs and potential of each city was important to participants for two reasons. First, unique plans helped gain support from

council and residents. As a city councillor in Parkertown pointed out, every city has their own set of challenges and opportunities to plan for: “There is no question that you can’t use one generic plan. Here is the plan from ABC city of the same size, use theirs. It doesn’t work that way”. The recreation director in Placeville agreed that the plan could not be the consultant’s or the staffs’ plan and that it had to be the community’s plan. And a Placeville resident involved with the development of the plan agreed and further added that a generic plan would not have gotten as much support from council or the public: “There is always the issue of consultant driven plans that don’t meet the needs of the community. But this (Placeville’s plan) was highly consultative – if it was the steering committee’s agenda, or the consultants agenda it wouldn’t have gotten this far” (Member involved with Placeville’s Plan).

Secondly, participants stated that being unique to the community meant the plan addressed the unique needs of a community. Addressing the differences of each city led to plans that were responsive to the specific community. This responsiveness was seen as leading to the public buying into and supporting the plan, which translated into the support of council and often times the financial support of implementation. Communities were unique in four ways. Participants discussed regional, ethnic, demographic and geographic characteristics that they felt should be addressed in the plan. Leisure preferences across regions change the demand for facilities and programs. For example, one city councillor highlighted that although squash was popular in central Ontario, racquetball was popular on the West Coast. Ethnic differences in leisure choices were seen to be important and addressed with a recreation plan. While Parkertown maintained bocce courts, Metropolis’s plan recommended an additional cricket pitch and Placeville’s

plan recommended “identifying, protecting, and promoting the city’s heritage districts such as French Town”.

The demographic make-up of a city also impacted the contents of a plan. For instance, the population of seniors in Placeville was above the provincial average, which participants agreed translated into unique demands. These unique demands included more passive leisure opportunities such as trails and recreational walking and fewer opportunities that related to organized physical sports. The Placeville plan recommended expanding their current senior centre, while in Parkertown the plan stated “no additional dedicated seniors’ space is required during the term of the plan”. Another way that we see demographics impacting plans related to youth. For example, the plan in Metropolis, identified the youth population as under serviced, and as a result the plan recommended addressing their unique needs through a youth strategy.

Finally, each city had their own geographic assets to consider, such as waterfronts, proximity to conservation areas, provincial parks and more recently changing weather patterns that all impacted the leisure service potential. Unique geographic features can be capitalized on by recreation and plans often made recommendations related to these. For example, one of Placeville’s nine priorities was to optimize the opportunity of their unique waterway through the city core. As well, the director and a city councillor in Parkertown discussed the impact less snowfall and warmer winters were having on the viability of their outdoor skating rinks, as well as the length of summer playing seasons. This led to the Parkertown plan recommending an artificial playing field to optimize the longer playing season.

Addressing the uniqueness of a city starts with selecting a planner with the right fit for the community because the planner ultimately writes the plan. Finding a planner with the right fit begins with the request for proposal. The RFP identifies the level of influence and involvement the consultant will have in developing the plan. This can range from a strictly expert consultant driven plan, to a more open, consultative and community development approach. As a planning advisor involved in Parkertown and Placeville stated, not every consultant is a good fit in every community:

And interestingly enough, I think they both made very appropriate selections of the consultant. Given the context of each community...given the way the terms were designed and developed, both consultants were good fits for each community. I am not sure they could have reversed it. I am not sure either consultant would have been a good fit for the other steering committees (Planning advisor - Parkertown and Placeville).

When the planner is not a good match for the community, for instance if the RFP does not adequately reflect the departmental needs, the process and the final plan may not adequately reflect or address the community's leisure needs. For example, a community in need of building community pride and understanding of recreation may benefit more from a process that engages many residents. Whereas, a community or department experiencing tremendous growth and changing needs, may need an objective outsider to provide the department with expert rationale and advice. The services provided by the planner in each of these examples were no less valuable¹ than the other under the right circumstances, but if reversed, the community may experience little benefit.

Cooperation with Other Municipal Departments

Other municipal departments such as finance and planning have roles to play in the planning and implementation of a recreation plan. The request for proposal likely outlines the role of other municipal departments in the planning process. As seen in this

study, involving other municipal departments such as finance and planning in the recreation planning process was important for two reasons. First, it allowed the recreation department to utilize internal expertise. As one planning consultant pointed out:

The quality of request for proposals varies (from city to city). In the 80's and 90's, when the provincial government funded recreation planning efforts, ministry advisors helped municipalities with their RFP's. As funding dried up in the late, this ended (Parkertown Planner).

Planners in the municipal planning departments can help recreation departments write a comprehensive request for proposal, something they would have far more experience with than recreation department staff. And throughout the planning process, other municipal staff can lend their expertise when there is a fit. For example, in Metropolis the finance department was able to ensure projects in the plan would meet funding criteria such as provincial legislation through the use of development charges. The steering committee in Metropolis comprised of senior managers from a variety of departments such as finance, communications and planning. This allowed the recreation department to utilize expertise from within the municipality. As the recreation director suggested, they are part of the process when their expertise is needed:

The other departments, the support departments to the plan, they are still support departments (in implementation). They are part of the process, like our planning department was involved for instance when we were designing the facilities for the community centre... Depending on what it was we were discussing we would bring somebody else in who needed to be there at the time (Metropolis Director).

The involvement of other municipal departments in Placeville and Parkertown was not as formalized. Rather they were consulted during the research process, such as when the planner needed demographic or land-use data from the planning department or with updates on progress during senior management meetings. They played more vital

roles in implementing ideas related to facilities development and parks policy implementation.

Secondly, bringing together other departments to work on the request for proposal and during the planning process was seen as helpful for implementation as it helped build relationships and shared understandings of leisure services throughout the municipal staff. The finance manager on the steering committee in Metropolis, expressed a greater appreciation and understanding for leisure services, and found that having been involved throughout the process was helpful when financial planning. It was seen as important that fellow senior managers knew about the process and had the opportunity to be involved. The impacts of the plan tended to cross-divisions and therefore influence the work of other departments. As the recreation planner with Metropolis stated, “They have to become part of the process and not just handed the document on their desk when it is complete”. The director of recreation in Metropolis discussed the cooperative atmosphere created in Metropolis as it was a city policy to include senior managers of all departments on planning steering committees. And while including other departments in planning efforts did not translate to full support all the time, there was a cooperative relationship.

Just because they were involved doesn't mean they support us 100% on all these things because they have competing priorities. My job is to push for the arenas, finance's job is to make sure that there is enough funding for it and if there's not, their job is to push against it. There's give and take. Everyone has his or her priorities and I think it's a testament to how the senior management works here. We cooperate with each other. No one really puts up walls (Recreation Director - Metropolis).

Participants agreed that it was important the recreation plan be consistent with other planning efforts in the municipality. In the last five years, Metropolis had completed a number of planning efforts such as an environmental strategic plan and a

transportation master plan. As the finance manager in Metropolis pointed out, the planning efforts of each department can impact other plans and vice versa. For example, transportation plans were valuable for the development of trails, bike lanes, and public transit access to leisure facilities. Official plans dictate the development of parkland and residential growth areas dictating where leisure facilities should be focused. And any environmental and economic development plans impact service delivery and tourist's use of city facilities. This integration and connection of the planning efforts was seen as important for the recreation plan, in informing other departments and for the plan to remain a priority of council. The finance manager pointed out when the plan is priority of council, the finance department takes that into consideration when developing a budget for council approval. "If it becomes a high priority of council then when financial planning we have that to work with and know council supports it" (Metropolis Finance Staff).

Realistic Plan for the Department

Finally, participants felt it was important for the plan to be realistic, and for the plan to fit within the capacity of the recreation and leisure department. In the context of plans, being "realistic" varied between communities but related to the number of recommendations, the scope of the plan, and the viability of projects within the plan. It was seen as essential to implementation that the plan and recommendations have an appropriate balance between the recommendations and the capacity of the department. It was important that staff perceived the plan as "doable." With regards to the number of recommendations, a recreation staff in Parkertown discussed how staff can become de-

motivated when there are too many recommendations and that with a more focused plan staff feel success is possible:

There may have been 200 recommendations (in a past plan) and there were just too many. Staff were trying to deal with them and couldn't. They were all over the map. So I think with this plan, it's more focused and I think it's more doable (with 23 action plans) (Parkertown Recreation Staff).

The planner for Metropolis noted the challenge of having a plan with such a broad scope including parks, recreation, culture and libraries. The recreation director in Parkertown further highlighted the issue of scope. She noted the value of smaller compartmentalized projects, and that being successful was also an important part of implementation:

I believe we get so wrapped up in doing comprehensive plans in one shot instead of doing it piecemeal and achieving those small projects to achieve the larger picture. Planners are notorious for this. They need to do everything. Well by the time we get everything done we'll be 90. What we are going to do is lose the window because we are more intent on being policy driven and right then getting the park on ground. And a lot of times that's where the community is very critical of staff, it shouldn't take this long, why does it take so long to get anything done? (Recreation Director - Parkertown).

Developing a "realistic" plan with a good fit for the capacity of the department came in many forms, and also related to the viability of projects within the plan. Depending again on the scope of the plan, developing plans with sustainable projects was a concern of communities. For example, in Metropolis, a user group was in the process of advocating for a performing arts centre. While the planner and department agreed, in order to be realistic they needed to look at the scale, capital and operating costs, and whether it was a sustainable project. Furthermore, the economics of the municipality and residents were important to consider. In order for the plan to be realistic, the initiatives and projects within the plan must also be a good fit.

In conclusion, participants felt that a recreation plan was more likely to be implemented when 1) the plan addressed the unique characteristics of the community, 2) when the department had the expertise and cooperation of other municipal employees, 3) when the plan was consistent and integrated with other planning efforts in the city and 4) when the plan fit well with the capacity of the department. The chapter will next address the factors of implementation related to the recreation department.

Factors Related to the Recreation Department

Historically, in Ontario, municipalities have held the primary responsibility for the provision of parks, recreation and cultural services. Due to the unique social, economic, and political circumstances of each city, no two departments are structured exactly the same. Further, the scope of services provided can range from parks, cemeteries, libraries, community centres, trails or cultural facilities as well as indirect vs. direct programming such as summer camps and fitness classes. This translates to a range of departmental titles such as the Parkertown and Metropolis Departments of Parks, Recreation and Culture and, the Placeville Department of Parks, Facilities and Leisure Services. For the purposes of this thesis, the title of recreation department will be used to describe the department for all municipalities.

A recreation department includes a variety of staff positions, which also differs from city to city. The number of staff in the department will depend of the size of the city and the scope of services provided by the department. Typically, there is a director, general manager or superintendent of recreation, who oversees all aspects of the department. The title of recreation director will be used to refer to this leadership role for the remainder of the thesis. Staff reporting to the recreation director may include,

facilities manager, coordinator of arts and culture, community development coordinator, volunteer coordinator, director of leisure programming, or special event planner. When a department provides direct programming, such as swimming lessons or summer camps, there are a number of seasonal and part time staff such as lifeguards providing these services. Metropolis had 217 fulltime employees, Parkertown had 60 full time staff and Placeville had 41 fulltime employees. Departments also relied on contract positions such as the Tourism Coordinator in Placeville whose position was approved by council on a one-year renewable contract basis. Furthermore, recreation departments relied heavily on volunteers to sit on committees, run special events, and work in leisure programming. For example, Placeville utilized approximately 300 volunteers over the course of a year.

Following a municipal recreation planning process, the recreation department takes the lead in implementation. In all three plans studied there were roles identified for other municipal departments (i.e. finance, planning), and key players in the community (YMCA, Boys and Girls Club), however, the recreation departments were charged with implementing the bulk of recommendations. For example, Parkertown's implementation strategy stated: "While the city is ultimately responsible for at least initiating all work related to the plan, the distinction is made here between work that can be done exclusively by the department staff and that which will require them to consult or work with others". Participants highlighted departmental factors that impacted implementation. The following section will outline the data collected related to the following departmental factors: resources, departmental atmosphere and the ability of the department to align and adapt to change.

Resources

Typically leisure services are one of the largest municipal departments, with operating budgets similar to transportation services. In 2007 Parkertown's budget for Parks, Recreation and Culture was approximately \$8 million, Placeville's 2006 budget was approximately \$6 million and Metropolis's budget in 2007 was close to \$29 million. Although, the departments dominate a large part of the municipal budget, a common thread in all three cases was that there was a need for more resources, whether capital, human, or time. Participants agreed there was never enough capacity within the department and that they would be able to implement their plan further if they had more resources, more staff or more time. As the Metropolis director commented, one of their biggest challenges was the volume of work created with the plan and trying to find the resources and people to keep up:

We try to do what we can, but that has got to be the biggest challenge, there is steep learning curve for staff, they are trying to do more than they really have the resources to do. And then the volume of the work, because of the volume of the work we just don't have the horses to be able to push this along. That has been the biggest challenge is trying to find the resources and people to do this (Recreation Director - Metropolis).

As the planner for Placeville commented, "really most important is how good the staff are. Do they have the guts and the gusto and the ability to move things forward?" Although participants spoke about never having enough capacity, they also pointed to the importance of optimizing what the department did have.¹ Rather than relying on building more capacity, the departments that were successful made efforts to create change and implement internal recommendations that optimized their current resources (i.e. staff). Departments were able to optimize in two ways. First, they could optimize staff "guts and gusto" by creating a departmental atmosphere of commitment, creativity and hard work. Secondly, the "ability" of current staff was optimized through organizational reviews that

aligned staff skills to required tasks. This involved re-assigning people to different jobs. Each are further described.

Creating Departmental Atmosphere Open to Change

Ultimately, it was the departmental staff that put the plan's recommendations into action through programs, facility development and policy. Therefore, creating a departmental atmosphere that was open to change, creativity and hard work led to a team that was committed to getting the plan implemented. As one recreation director stated, "when you have staff that have done certain things for a long time it is difficult to rethink it" (Recreation Director, Parkertown). Participants agreed that implementing a recreation plan was hard work and as the Metropolis Director stated, they all had full time jobs before the plan and it would be easier for staff to just say they did not have the time:

Everybody in this department has a job to do already. And then when you say to them, by the way you are responsible for making sure a \$30 million facility is built on time and looks beautiful and is perfect, when the have no experience doing that, that's a real challenge. It's a testament to staff that they are doing it. Because it would be really easy to say "you know we're busy, we're not going to do the event strategy this year, we are going to put that off and do it in two years, or we're not going to do the youth thing, even though it's important, we're too busy doing other things". But everybody's said this is really important and we need to address this now. And we are sort of doing double duties trying to get this stuff out (Recreation Director – Metropolis).

As part of creating a supportive departmental atmosphere participants commented on the impact of a unified staff team within the recreation ¹department. Having a unified team meant the staff from all divisions (i.e. aquatics, parks, arenas) advocated to council and residents for recreation as a whole. They understood the overall goals of community recreation, and the role that each sector (i.e. aquatics, parks, arenas) played in achieving the overall mission of the department. When there was not a unified team, the divisions

were competing with each to further their specific interests. The recreation director in Parkertown discussed the impact of these “silos” or divided sectors:

The silo impact can be extreme when you have parks operation, parks design, recreation services, and recreation arena facilities separated. Those staff can have a very narrow view of what their responsibilities are. If they only see arena operations or they only see arena facilities, they have no interest in understanding the aquatics side of recreation or the programming side of culture. So you want to have a staff team that is well versed and committed to understanding their responsibility to serve all of your community. It’s educating your staff (Recreation Director – Parkertown).

Parkertown’s approach to breaking down these silos involved a few simple measures. For example to bring staff together, they held staff meetings and trainings across divisions. They shared a lunchroom and if a division received a monthly publication (i.e. Aquatics Annual) it was departmental policy to leave the issues in the lunchroom to share among divisions. The recreation director also saw membership with professional organizations such as Parks and Recreation Ontario and sending staff to attend professional conferences as helping to achieve team unity and further developing staff’s broad understanding of leisure services.

The silo effect with divisions was seen during the planning of Placeville’s plan. The recreation planner commented on the impact of the competing divisions as they were competing against and among each other for resources, “there were silos and not a lot of crossover between them. They actually challenged and competed with each other. The director was the glue holding things all together though”. Although, Metropolis has a larger department than the other two cases, with more staff and divisions, the silo effect was not seen as having an impact. There was an overall municipal atmosphere that promoted supportive cross-divisional relationships and the recreation director believes,

this came directly from the municipality's chief administrative officer's (CAO) philosophy.

Aligning and Adapting to Change

The second part of optimizing departmental capacity occurred in two ways; 1) through aligning staff skills with the departmental needs and 2) adapting the department to meet community needs. As recreation department's work to implement their plan over time, community needs change. It was important to recognize that this change may warrant adjusting the functions of professional staff members in the department. The plans in this study made recommendations relating to departmental mandates and how the departmental staff could better serve the community needs. It was seen as important for the department to adapt to change as best they could. As the Placeville director commented, despite not having access to more staff, they were able to work with the community and volunteers to get things done:

With servicing the community we want to take more of a community development approach. Which is why we need to have these advisory committees working with us on our behalf. It's been made very clear to me very quickly that we are not going to be hiring more staff. We had a community development position that was put forward, and it had to be taken out of the budget because we couldn't afford it. We are going to have to do more with the community, with volunteers (Recreation Director, Placeville).

As a planning advisor for both Parkertown and Placeville stated, each of their plans made recommendations relating to the changing needs in the community:

This is where it is very interesting because in Placeville there was some clear messaging and actually in Parkertown as well there was very similar messaging. That what the community needed or what the community was looking for was not necessarily the same skill set that the current staff have (Planning Advisor – Parkertown and Placeville).

The Parkertown recreation department worked under a community development model. However, their recreation plan identified some weaknesses in their approach and made recommendations to further develop their role as a facilitator for community development. The plan recommended “strengthening the departments community development role, and supporting it with a more functional committee system, appropriately aligned partnerships and policies, and the staff resources to do the required work”. Parkertown undertook a major organizational review. They rewrote job descriptions, aligned divisions such as parks operation and park design to provide more consistency and created new positions where gaps were found (i.e. policy development). As a planning advisor discussed, the recreation director had to make tough decisions, because as departments moved to further embrace their community development mandate, the skills needed within the department shifted:

They (the recreation director) can either work with staff to develop the skills and that’s quite a leap to go from direct programming to community development. Some people can make the transition and some cannot. So as a manager you have to make the determination of whether the staff are still a good fit. If they are that’s great, if not, can they get there with appropriate training and if they can’t, what do you do? (Planning Advisor - Parkertown and Placeville)

Metropolis was also working on an organizational review. Where Parkertown was experiencing a shift in the skills because of the departmental mandate of community development, Metropolis was finding that with new programs and facilities recommended by the plan, the staff needed to shift in order to respond to the changing services.

That is why we are doing the organizational review. There has been some shifting simply because we’ve had to. We took on a new facility so somebody had to run it. Someone has taken that on in addition to what they were doing. Then that facility has a restaurant, and we’ve never run a restaurant before so now someone

is going to learn about how to run that initiative (Recreation Director - Metropolis).

Placeville has yet to implement much change with staff. There have been no organizational reviews, and although their plan made recommendations around staff alignment and the need to fill gaps in the department with new staff such as a community development coordinator, this had not occurred. They have been able to obtain funding for one-year contracts for a business manager of the waterfront as well as a tourism coordinator. However, no review of the alignment of current staff positions and required skills has taken place.

Further related to the theme of aligning staff skill, it was seen as vital for the department to have a strong recreation director to be a lead force within the community. The recreation director was in a position to advocate for leisure services among partners, residents, the business community, and city council. The recreation director needed to be perceived as a prominent leader by others. As one of the planners stated, the department must take a lead role in getting the partners together for implementation.

The leadership (for implementation) should be with the department. There were recommendations for fingers from the city into the community that would have a role to play, but if the city doesn't encourage it, and push it and say let's have a meeting to bring people together, it won't happen (Planner – Placeville).

Furthermore, finding creative approaches to implementation were discussed in each of the cases and often involved external support. Departments had to rely on the capacity of staff to identify and seek out external support. External support came in the form of expertise from other departments within the municipality, from community partners, or outside consultants, similar to hiring the planning consultant to support the plan development itself.

In each case, external support was particularly important regarding facility development. All three plans made recommendations for new facilities yet it had been at least ten years since any of the departments had built a new leisure facility. The current departmental staff in two of the cities had no experience in facility planning and development. For example, Metropolis and Placeville relied on the support from their colleagues such as the municipal engineers and planners. And in Parkertown, they hired external consultants to fill gaps in the current staff skill set.

We have some major capital projects going on. And they (recreation staff) have to oversee not only the whole development but also the implementation and the building. They've been busy. We hadn't built a new capital facility in like 35 years so this is new. None of our current staff have ever done this before. We have had to bring in a lot of outside consultants to help us through it. Because sometimes it is cheaper to bring in a consultant then hire an expert in the field (City Councillor – Parkertown).

External support from consultants and other municipal departments provided expertise in areas of need for those departments.

Recreation departments were more likely to make recommendations a reality and help keep their plans track by 1) creating a positive departmental atmosphere open to change, 2) aligning staff skills and adapting the departmental policies to the changing needs of the community, and 3) by seeking external support when the department lacked expertise.

1

Factors Related to the Broader Implementation Context

When a city council approves a recreation plan, it is approved “in principle.” Approval in principle is a process in which a plan is endorsed by city council, which essentially means that council agrees that it supports the vision and direction outlined in the plan and that the plan will have a positive impact on the community. However,

approval of the plan does not necessarily mean that council is willing to support the plan's recommendations with funding. The implementation of a recreation plan occurs within a political context. Recreation departments compete with other municipal services such as transportation, public works, fire and police services for limited municipal funds. Thus, although recreation departments have the autonomy to implement recommendations related to internal processes such as changes in programming and staff restructuring, when recommendations involve changes to policy, involve non-governmental partnerships, or require funding, the item must return to council for specific approval, and it is possible that city council will not approve it.

City councillors, who are responsible for balancing the needs of all departments, must make decisions with the whole corporation and the best interest of their constituents in mind. City councillors are elected officials and are therefore accountable for making decisions reflective of their constituent's wants and needs. Achieving the support of council is made easier when residents support the recreation plan and its recommendations. It is this relationship between the public's wants and needs and the decision-making power of city council that makes the broader political context so influential in the implementation of recreation plans. Without the support of council, recommendations from the plan can not be implemented. This section will first highlight how the recreation plans were seen and used by council as a tool, and then discuss the factors in the three communities that influenced council and resident support of the recreation plans.

Plan Becomes Tool for Council

Participants saw a recreation plan as a valuable tool for councillors. Recreation plans became a “tool and a guideline” to “anchor” municipal decision-making (Parkertown Director). Participants discussed how city councillors relied on staff to provide them with the information they needed to make the most appropriate choices and to address the concerns of residents. Reflecting this idea, a city councillor from Parkertown stated:

It is important that you give your elected officials good tools to a) evaluate and make good decisions on and b) to go to the residents with saying this is how we came to this conclusion and it is based on the plan (City Councillor - Parkertown).

In addition to the recreation plans being a tool that provided vision and focus to the council in decision-making, a plan also helped city councillors and staff address the concerns of their constituents. For example, when residents raised concerns about recommendations or had ideas for programs or initiatives that did not align with the goals of plan, councillors were able to respond using the plan as their rationale. As the planner in Metropolis stated:

(Councillors) are likely to make a budget for squeaking wheels. This (the plan) is their salvation. When someone comes along with an idea, they can let them know where that idea fits on the wish list. It gives them leverage to say that. That can be a godsend for a councillor (Planner - Metropolis).

Participants agreed the plan was a useful tool when addressing the average concern and satisfied many residents, however when it came to residents with their minds firmly set against a recommendation, this councillor felt the plan was not going to change their minds. He said:

Even though I can tell them that by putting in trail, they will be healthier, it will be better for your kids, that they won't have to ride their bike on the road, they can go to school on the trail. They will say, yes, but I don't want kids in my back yard. So we have to factor in the political side. Yes having a plan helps, however,

when it comes down to the decision, people say they don't care about a strategic plan (Councillor - Parkertown).

Staff's Ability to Negotiate Council Support

Implementing a recreation plan in a political context means a recreation department must negotiate both council and resident support. Council support, which will be discussed first followed by resident support, can be influenced by two important factors; 1) their attitude towards recreation and 2) the alignment of the plan goals with their own community priorities.

Participants stated that an important factor regarding implementation was whether or not council valued recreation. Council was more likely to support the plan when recreation was seen as a valuable community asset. If recreation was valued in a community, both residents and council were more likely to support investment in recreation services. When recreation was not seen as an essential community service, support seemed to favour services such as roads and sewers. As the director of Parkertown stated, "It's always roads and sewers, but when it comes down to it, what councillors hear most about is, "I want my park" or "I want this (leisure service)". Valuing recreation services helped garner support for implementation.

Implementation of the recreation plans was impacted by the priorities each council had set out to achieve in their four-year term. For example, a few years ago the council in Metropolis focused on having a world-class transportation system. The council's overall goal was to "create a liveable community, and part of that is recreation" (Finance Staff, Metropolis). Therefore, the council placed high priority on funding of transportation. As they continued to create a "liveable community" they were supportive

of the recreation plan and its implementation because it fit well with their “liveable community” priorities.

However, council priorities shifted over time, for example Metropolis was focused on a liveable community first with transportation followed by recreation. The director in Parkertown spoke about the shift they were experiencing as council began to recognize the importance of the environmental movement. She spoke about positioning the recreation department in a way to benefit from councils’ focus on the environment:

I think parks, recreation and culture is starting to take a more high profile understanding of healthy community. With earth hour, earth day, the focus on environmental responsibility, greening, and recycling, that’s where you are going to start seeing a lot of these reports and policies being recognized by council and get integrated (Recreation Director - Parkertown).

The second factor in attaining council support was whether or not the goals or priorities of council aligned with the goals of the recreation plan. For the planner in Parkertown, this alignment was the primary reason for plans being implemented (or not). He stated:

If I boiled it all down, for me there is one factor in implementation. Assuming all the recommendations are reasonable and based on good research, there is one factor - the primary reason for plans not being implemented is there can be a fundamental difference between the perspectives of planners and that of council. Our recommendations may make sense in the planning realm, but they don’t necessarily align with the political goals. And if councillors don’t agree and if their goals are different, then plans get stopped (Planner - Parkertown).

City councils are challenged to balance all municipal priorities they can plan for, but participants also commented on the challenge of staying focused on the plan when emerging priorities arise, both threats and opportunities. Theoretically the plan can stay on track with adequate support and funding, however, the municipality must respond to emergencies, as well as capitalize on opportunities. For example, threats such as natural

disasters and opportunities such as the chance to put a bid in for a major sporting event need to be addressed by city council. These emerging priorities may not appear in the plan but due to their importance and because they attract the attention of voters, city staff and councillors must respond. As the Metropolis director stated:

If the plan says we need an arena in two years, we can't just go ahead and build one. What if we have bridge fall down? Now that is an extreme example but we may have another emerging priority. You have to look at what we can do in the context of the entire corporation's needs (Recreation Director - Metropolis).

Staff's Ability to Negotiate Resident Support

The implementation of a recreation plan needed the support of residents, and participants saw this achieved in a number of ways. Most participants expressed similar views to the planner in Placeville, who argued that having an open and consultative planning process allowed residents to know what was happening and gave them an opportunity to listen and be heard. He stated "from our perspective, the more the public knows what you are doing and trusts what you are doing the more likely they are going to push to have it implemented in the end" (Placeville Planner). Public support of a recreation plan and recommendations was helped when there were two things, 1) transparency and 2) communication.

When residents saw an open, transparent process and were made aware of the recommendations they were more likely to support the plan. Public involvement during the planning process built a relationship between the planner, the public and the department. When residents saw their ideas and concerns reflected in the plan, this built trust and credibility.

You have to acknowledge that this is the process. It does help, it is really important because if there's no consultation and assumptions are made about what you include and it's completely contrary to what that community wants. Basically

you always need to be ready to have an encyclopaedic background with your staff team ready to talk with the person who thinks there has been no public consultation. That's why we try to post everything on the website, for transparency (Recreation Director - Parkertown).

The involvement meant residents knew about the plan and placed accountability for implementation on the department and council. This awareness meant councillors and the department have a more difficult time putting the plan aside. As one planner stated regarding the public involvement:

Council saw the credibility with this. There was trust in the process and the results were trustworthy. But it would be very easy to set aside if no one was accountable – if no one knew or was involved (Planner - Placeville).

Participants in Placeville discussed the impact that a pessimistic community attitude can have on implementation. The “Placeville attitude” was seen in residents, staff and on committees. The planner in Placeville described the attitude as:

It's good enough for Placeville. If you are supposed to do X, half of X was good enough for Placeville. There is an unwillingness as well as an inability to do better. This can really put a wet blanket on things (Planner - Placeville).

The director of Placeville felt that in order to overcome this pessimistic attitude the department needed a success. They needed something to build the community's confidence in the benefits of recreation and in the recreation department again. He stated:

The one thing I have noticed about Placeville is the fact that they need a success. They need something to show that they can move in that direction because so many times in the past for some reason or another they haven't been able to do what they wanted. And so there is an attitude in the advisory committees. Even trying to get advisory committees together. We had to re-advertise every position (Recreation Director - Placeville)

Achieving Support through Formal Connections

In an effort to influence implementation, in each of the three cases, advisory committees existed as a formal connection between the recreation department, the

community and city council. Committees can represent a strategy to achieve the alignment between council goals and the plan. Committees are flexible and able to respond quickly to change. While these committees varied in size, structure, and scope of work, their jobs were similar. Each committee included members of the community, recreation department staff and a city councillor assigned as a liaison. Metropolis's ongoing committees included, a parks and recreation committee, a seniors committee, a youth committee and an arts and culture committee. Parkertown had a recreation committee, an arts and culture committee, a trails and bikeways committee, and a 'park in the city' committee. Placeville had an arts and culture committee, a seniors centre committee, an arenas committee, and a tourism committee. Typically the committees had 10 – 15 members and met 6 to 10 times a year. Once council approved the recreation plans, the committees were involved in implementation to varying degrees. Based on the scope of their work, they worked with the plan to prepare reports and make recommendations that were then presented to council for approval. They were involved to various degrees with the implementation of these recommendations. For example, the Trails and Bikeways committee in Parkertown made recommendations for the location of new trails and were involved in the physical work to get the trail on the ground.

Participants agreed that committees played an important role in keeping the department on track with the implementation of their plans. As the planner in Placeville stated, "committees are a formal connection to the community, committees put a community face on implementation." Participants felt committees helped with implementation in two important ways. Firstly, councillors sitting on committees

provided a supportive voice in council meetings and within the community because they were able to advocate for the committee's recommendations:

What's great with councillors that do sit on committees is that usually if you are a part of a committee you have buy in. So when the committee brings a report to council that council person will stand up and defend whatever is going on. It helps to have that voice (Recreation Staff - Parkertown).

Interestingly, each municipality appeared to have a different approach when it came to the input of staff at council meetings. In Parkertown, the director stated that "because staff cannot speak out in council meetings, you are like a child, speak only when spoken to. So if no one cares to ask you, you just have to sit there" (Parkertown Director). Whereas in Placeville, it was noted that when a staff report was discussed in council meetings, a recreation staff person was routinely asked to comment. The procedure was the same in each community, staff were only able to speak in meetings when asked. The difference was that it was the norm in Placeville for council to ask for staff input but in Parkertown, they relied on having a councillor informed of the leisure department and the recommendations, rather than staff input during the meeting. Without that council liaison's voice, the opportunity to advocate for recommendations can cease to exist.

Secondly, committees were valuable because they allowed residents to have a connection to councillors. This allowed for mutual knowledge exchange. The councillor became informed of the goals and perspective of the committee, and as a staff in Parkertown commented, committee members learned the rationale for decisions made by council:

The councillor can inform the committee about different things. Like for example with the arena fundraising the council person could explain to the committee, that there was a fundraising report and the recommendation was to try to get revenue

for naming rights (instead of the committee naming it after a decommissioned pad). And sometimes coming from council the committee won't question. Where as, if I gave them that same message they may question it (Parkertown Recreation Staff).

Public involvement also meant the inclusion of councillors and city staff in the planning process. This involvement was seen to help with plan approval and then during implementation. As one planner stated, having councillors involved in public forums meant they heard what the public was asking for and assuming this was what was in the plan, they were more likely to support it in the end.

Councillors attended the search conference and the forum they knew what they had heard from residents. So when the plan came forward, they knew it was what they had heard. For those councillors who weren't involved it was an easy target to object, but those involved knew what they had heard (Planner - Placeville).

Participants saw committees that were established and had previous experience working together as being able to pick up the plan and move forward with greater ease, as compared with new committees. The committees in Parkertown and Metropolis had been working together before the current recreation plan and had an established structure and scope of work. Adopting the plan, and working on recommendations gave them focus and direction for the work they were already doing. Whereas, in Placeville the committees were a recommendation of the plan and were still in their infancy, having only met on one or two occasions. As the director stated working with the committees and specifically new committees involved patience as they work to establish themselves and work through their recommendations:

We haven't set any time frames on it simply because we want the community, the advisory committees, to work at their pace. So we don't want preconceived ideas, or to say I want this done by such and such time (Recreation Director - Placeville).

In addition to needing support through formal committees of residents, council and staff, it was important to have allies from all sectors. The need for allies and advocates of the plan has been noted earlier, however participants also spoke of the important need to have champions of the plan from various sectors: council, public and the department. As the Planner for Placeville discussed regarding the creation of an implementation steering committee:

That group has to be lead by someone that can champion. Someone who believes. The Sheila's of the world are rare but that's the kind of person you need. Someone who can have a voice, without burning bridges. You have to have a champion that can been a leader in the community – and then there is a much better chance. You need that in each of the key areas – staff, council and community (Planner - Placeville).

Furthering the importance of having champions from all sectors, the director of Placeville discussed how having voices of councillors and residents in support of the plan added credibility to the recommendations when presenting them to council.

Any time you can bring something that has residents input, it means more than if it was me as director coming and saying here's what I think is good for the community. The biggest point I find is not only the input of the residents but the fact that there is a council liaison and a staff liaison on that committee. When it gets to council, that council member will champion it, as well as the residents. So it's not like it's something staff are trying to put forward. It's the residents who have sought other input and are saying here's where we want to go with it. So I think it adds more credibility (Recreation Director - Placeville).

In conclusion, the recreation departments had found a number of strategies to navigate the political environment. Firstly, to help gain the support of councillors, participants noted the importance of aligning the goals of the plan to priorities of city council and establishing a formal connection to the process, such as with an advisory committee. Secondly, to help gain public support of the plan and recommendations

participants discussed the importance of communication, which built awareness and transparency to build trust.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The theoretical framework for this study, drawn from the planning literature, viewed plan implementation as related to four key factors: plan quality, agency capacity, public support, and the political context (Berke et al., 2006; Laurian et al., 2004). In this framework, each of these factors was considered to be distinct and equally weighted in terms of their influence on plan implementation (refer to Figure 1). While the findings of this study support the importance of these factors, they also suggest that in a recreation setting the political context and the support of the public are too closely related to separate, as the political support of the recreation plans and recommendations within the documents depended heavily on council members' perceptions of public support. Thus, this thesis has collapsed the four original factors into three: plan quality, capacity of the department, and the broader political context. The broader political context incorporates the priorities and goals of city council with those of the public. It was this relationship between the public's wants and needs and the decision-making power of city council that made the broader political context so influential in the implementation of the recreation plans. Furthermore, the involvement of the public was as much about creating a plan that was right for the community, as it was about building political support. Therefore, I argue that there are three factors of implementation in a recreation setting: factors related to the plan, factors related to the department and factors related to the broader political context, which is the most critical.

The literature on planning tends to describe the planning process as a rational, linear process that begins with communities identifying goals and objectives, followed by considering alternatives, establishing budgets and schedules, and then creating the plan

(Hodge, 2003). In this framework, implementation is presented as the “step” that follows plan creation, suggesting that implementation is part of this rational process. The findings of this study however, suggest that implementation is in fact *not* a step that is similar to the earlier steps of the planning process; that in fact, as soon as a plan is created and released to a municipality, it enters into a highly political environment and that success of implementation is related to the ability of the actors and structures in this environment to move the plan into action. Thus, while a well written plan and agency capacity are necessary, these more technical and rational aspects are not sufficient to guarantee the successful implementation of the plan. Instead, what impacts implementation is the dedication and commitment of recreation staff to the plan, the level of support from key stakeholders in the community, such as elected officials and community partners (i.e. sports and arts groups), and the status of recreation within city hall and other municipal departments (i.e. planning, engineering, finance).

Thus, to understand “what gets plans off the shelf” as well as to develop strategies to facilitate plan implementation, a framework that focuses on the political context of implementation is needed. The political environment of recreation plan implementation is depicted in Figure 1. This framework suggests that recreation plan implementation takes place in a municipal environment involving three groups in a complex relationship: the recreation department, city hall and the public. Further, the model suggests that implementation can be facilitated by developing or expanding strategies that: (1) build the power of the recreation department within the municipal government structure; (2) build support for recreation within the local community; and (3) build the political and organizational capacity in the recreation department. As illustrated by the cyclical design

of the model, the three bodies and strategic approaches are interrelated, and that building power, support or capacity in any of the three areas can positively impact implementation success.

Political Context of Recreation Plan Implementation

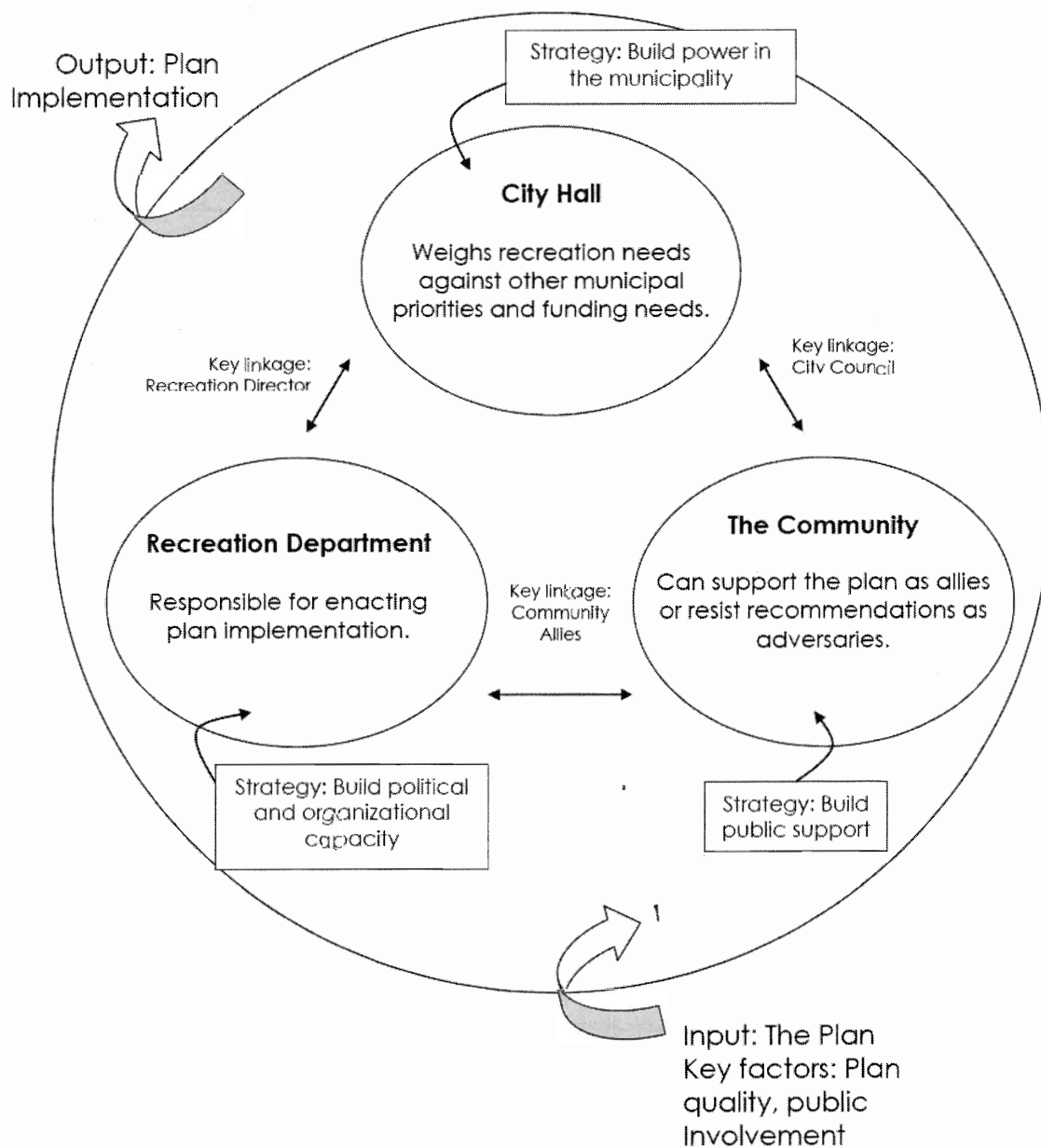


Figure 2. The Political Context of Recreation Plan Implementation

City Hall: Building Power in Municipal Government

Contributing to the challenge of implementation was an issue George Cuff discussed in a 1990 article entitled “First on the agenda, last on the budget.” In this article, Cuff argued that although councillors are generally a well-meaning and sincere group of people, city managers, treasurers and finance committees make many budget decisions before council is involved. The councillors are presented a draft budget with roads to maintain and equipment to buy (Cuff). It is not hard to understand how councillors lose sight of the soft services (i.e. recreation) and the community vision they campaigned for, when they are confronted with serious budget considerations. Cuff argued that there are three certainties with municipal councils: (1) they are always forced to decide what services are least versus most important; (2) the demands of council will always exceed the funds available; and (3) staff and the public will continue to bring creative and worthwhile projects to the table, but many of these will not survive the budget process (1990).

The findings of this study continue to support the arguments Cuff made close to two decades ago. Informants in all three municipalities described a city hall environment in which recreation departments were ‘competing’ against other municipal departments (i.e. fire, water, transportation) for their share of city resources. Although all municipalities described moments of ‘losing out’ to other departments, what differed among the three cases was the differing abilities of the three recreation departments in this competitive political sphere. In both Metropolis and Parkertown, the recreation departments competed on equal footing to the aforementioned “hard” service departments and in turn, successfully garnered the resources required to implement the recreation

plan. In contrast, the recreation department in Placeville was viewed as a low-status department in city hall, and the city did not support motions that involved allocating additional funds to the recreation department, which stalled the implementation process.

Thus, a key strategy for recreation plan implementation is to look for ways to build the power of recreation departments within municipal government, so that the department has a greater influence in this competitive environment and in turn, will be more able to garner support for its initiatives. As the main liaison to city hall for the department, many of these strategies relate to the role of the recreation director. This study illustrates that political savvy is needed by the recreation department to implement recreation plans. Having a recreation plan, and a vision documented before the budget process begins can serve to remind council members why they ran for office when framed as improving quality of life. The recreation plan can help lend confidence and credibility to a department and help councillors, city managers, and finance departments focus on these soft services.

Two strategies that participants deemed effective in heightening the status of recreation in their communities and thus building power in the municipal structure were to involve other municipal staff throughout the process and to ensure that recreation had a voice in council. During the planning process and throughout implementation, recreation departments can utilize expertise from within the municipality. For example, when developing terms of reference and requests for proposals the planning department should be involved and asked to comment. Likewise when developing budget projections and financial implications the finance department should be consulted because they will have current expertise in funding strategies and may provide more creative ideas for funding

projects. As seen in Metropolis, having a steering committee that included staff from other municipal departments helped build an awareness of both the leisure services and its benefits.

The second strategy is was the importance of a voice in council. As decisions regarding the implementation of the recreation plan will be reliant on the support of council members, recreation professionals need to foster relationships with city council by attending council meetings and when possible speak about staff reports in council chambers. If the culture of city hall (like Parkertown) does not involve staff reporting to council, it is critical that recreation staff educate councillors to speak on their behalf. This can be achieved by including them on committees and creating committees of council where being at the meetings is a priority. One way to continually foster relationships with council is through the creation of an overarching recreation committee with a council liaison. This was a strategy discussed by many participants as effective and important, whether they had such a committee or not

Besides building the political leadership skills of the recreation director, a second way to build power in local government is by finding ways to more closely tie recreation to the official plan of the municipality. As Eagles and Gebhardt (in press) pointed out, in contrast to official municipal plans in which adherence to the plans is mandatory (by law) for planners and developers, a recreation plan is only a guide for decision-making. As such, city councils are not required to implement the recommendations of recreation plans and further, if a recommendation within the recreation plan conflicts with the official plan, the official plan is followed (Eagles & Gebhardt). Thus, the more that the recreation plan can be incorporated into the official plan (through a motion in council) or

be aligned with and certainly not in conflict with the priority items outlined in the official plan, the greater potential there will be for implementation.

The Public: Building Community Support

Another aspect of the political environment of plan implementation is the role of the public – in this case, the residents of the local community. Because city councillors hold much of the decision making power in municipalities, and the councillors represent the citizens, the support of the local residents can have an important impact on the implementation of recommendations. Based on this, a key strategy to facilitate plan implementation is to develop and organize community members who can serve as champions and advocates for the plan (and recreation). As seen with building power in the municipality and councillors, one way to foster relationships with citizens is through the creation of an overarching recreation committee. This strategy provides the opportunity for residents to become advocates of the recreation plan, and provide a formal link to council and the wider community.

Advocates in the municipality may include city councillors, steering committee members, and residents, all of whom need to be organized to support the plan. Houlihan and Green (2006) stated that the advocacy of key individuals can have an important impact on policy change. In their work with policy change in physical education and school sport in England, they argued that the personal interest, enthusiasm, and entrepreneurial skills of key individuals were important to changes in school policy. When key individuals were within a supportive context, in which the initiative was seen as creating positive spill-over effects in other areas of importance (i.e., health and community safety), their influence was greatest (Houlihan & Green). Furthermore, the

advocacy efforts of key individuals was supported by an increasing amount of evidence around the health benefits of school sport and the risks associated with sedentary lifestyles (Houlihan & Green). Therefore, key individuals were more effective when their cause was aligned with other issues receiving attention, when interest groups were not in opposition to their cause and when evidence was gathered to support their efforts.

Parallels to recreation are that advocacy efforts can draw on research that describes the economic, health and social benefits of leisure services. Metropolis recognized the economic benefits of recreation services. Key individuals such as, councillors and staff advocated for services by promoting such benefits as quality of life with the intent of attracting businesses and individuals looking to relocate to communities offering a higher quality of life through comprehensive recreation services. Although this was seen in Metropolis, the two other communities could have strengthened the benefits of recreation.

To help in navigating the political arena and to build public support, Kaczynski, Havitz, and McCarville (2005) suggest that a public recreation department should tell its own story. Without being able to share their successes and benefits to the community, it is possible that their utility will be questioned and their funding stalled (Kaczynski et al.). As these authors noted, the position recreation has traditionally held in the minds of stakeholders is that of a discretionary, nonessential service, that is nice to have, but should be funded only when all essential services have been taken care of (Crompton & Witt, 1997). Thus, one strategy to garner public support for recreation funding is for agencies to tell their story and in turn gain public and advocate support is through repositioning. Repositioning is “the process of fostering a desired image of the recreation

agency, in the minds of stakeholders, such as citizens and elected officials, relative to other public agencies that are competing for tax dollars” (Kaczynski et al., 2005, p. 242). A recreation plan that holds a certain “position” will ensure funding and support from stakeholders. Re-positioning can be used during plan implementation to ensure that initiatives outlined in the plan and the goals of plan implementation hold a position in the minds of decision-makers and residents that ensure resources and support are directed toward the plan.

Recreation departments can work to position themselves into a more desirable position by using their recreation plan as a tool and by adopting one of three repositioning strategies. One approach is to engage in *real* repositioning, which involves changing the actual work of the department so that it better addresses community needs (Kaczynski et al., 2005). For example, Parkertown was decommissioning many of their baseball diamonds and creating space for more artificial turf soccer fields, reflecting the changing interests of their citizens. A second approach involves *competitive* repositioning, which means altering stakeholder perceptions of what other valued public agencies do (Crompton & Witt, 1997; Kaczynski et al.). For example, if a community priority was the health of its citizens, the recreation department could point out the fallacies of a competitor’s solution (i.e. the health care system lowering wait times). This competitive repositioning could be enhanced by also providing residents information supporting the prevention of the health issues through active recreation. A third approach, and the approach that is most relevant to building community support, is for agencies to engage in *psychological* repositioning. Psychological repositioning involves using marketing and communication approaches to bring the benefits and outcomes of

recreation to the attention of stakeholders and alter what stakeholders *believe* the department does. For example, testimonials could be collected from business executives that attest to the role of park and recreation amenities in relocation decisions (Crompton & Witt).

Connected to the psychological repositioning process is for agencies to accentuate the ways that recreation can help address important community issues (Crompton & Witt, 1997). As these authors note, “a foundation of strong and widespread support will only be built if park and recreation agencies contribute to the achievement of central political and community goals” (Crompton & Witt, 1997). Clearly priorities of council vary across municipalities, but as Crompton and Witt suggest, economic development and alleviating social problems are likely among them. Moreover, Crompton (2000) identified nine ways public recreation can contribute to a community’s prosperity. These include attracting tourists, attracting businesses, attracting retirees, enhancing real estate values, stimulating urban rejuvenation, improving health, addressing the needs of the unemployed, alleviating youth crime, and environmental stewardship. By positioning recreation so that it aligns with key community issues, there is likelihood that public support and working with allies and advocates in the community the implementation of the plans initiatives may be easier.

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The Recreation Department: Building Political and Organizational Capacity

The implementation of a recreation plan will be enhanced as the departments builds its’ political and organizational capacity. The concept of ‘institutional readiness’ may be applicable to the ability of recreation department to get their plans implemented. Barnes and Brayley (2006) discuss the concept of institutional readiness in relation to an

organization's readiness to fundraise. This idea of agency readiness was also put forth by Crompton (1999) when discussing the need for an organization to prepare itself to recruit and retain volunteers. Being ready for change in implementing a recreation plan may ultimately lead to a smoother and more effective implementation. Parkertown and Metropolis seemed "ready" to implement their plans and immediately took steps to get things going. Whether it was big ticket projects such as in Metropolis (i.e. leisure complex, artificial soccer turf) or internal organization restructuring in Parkertown (i.e. hiring an outside consultant to conduct a workshop on community development) these two departments took action to implement their plans and keep staff engaged and informed of the change. However, Placeville's implementation did not carry the same momentum out of the planning process and implementation appeared more difficult and stalled. It may be that the department was not ready to implement.

An aspect of implementation that was overlooked in the literature on planning and plan implementation was that the implementation of a recreation plan involves change for the recreation department. This change can range from the programming and facilities offered to residents, to a change in the departmental mandate and staff requirements. It is highly unlikely a recreation plan will recommend the department maintain status quo in all facets of their work. Therefore, the recreation department, and the recreation staff, need to be prepared and willing to create and be involved in change. As respondents in Reid's (1989) study of recreation plans cited, implementation was a "matter of will, not money" (p. 10).

However, change upsets the balance of an organization. Organizational change raises questions among staff about their current performance, their abilities and job

security (Welch & McCarville, 2003). Change pushes them toward the unknown when they prefer to retreat into the comfort of predictability. Welch and McCarville identified four factors that help in creating staff acceptance of change in a parks agency. Therefore the four factors Welch and McCarville identified are worth considering when recreation departments are implementing the internal changes that are outlined in recreation plans. The first factor was purpose. Staff tended to accept organizational change more when they felt the purpose of the change was both legitimate and desirable (i.e. wanted by the community). Secondly, the process of how the change was implemented was important. As the authors noted, a process that included communication and involvement with staff was key in creating acceptance of the change. The third factor was that of the plan, which referred to the nature of the change itself and staff expectations. The final factor identified by Welch and McCarville was people. The acceptance of change was enhanced by existing goodwill among staff (Welch & McCarville). Acceptance of the change was eased when staff worked well together in a positive environment. As well, a good relationship among the staff can enhance communication and involvement in the change process.

Having these factors in place may avoid or alleviate staff resistance to the change associated with implementing the internal changes outlined in a recreation plan. One method of overcoming resistance is to create a departmental atmosphere that is receptive to change. This can increase the likelihood of a recreation plan being successfully implemented. In describing how to increase an organization's effectiveness, Homan (2008) suggests creating an organization environment that is receptive to change. This involves creating an awareness of the need for change, having staff workshops to identify

opportunities for improvement, connecting change to the mission of the organization, and promoting the idea of a learning organization. This again highlights the importance of emphasizing the purpose of the change and aligning the change to the overall goals of the recreation department.

The final finding worth further discussion is one that recreation directors discussed as essential for implementation. They emphasized the importance of plans being “doable” and “realistic”. They wanted their plans to have some degree of “implementability”. A recreation plan that was written with implementation in mind and that incorporated the realities of the department and the community, was valued more by the directors and was seen to be more likely to have success in implementation. The findings of this study suggest that when plans were consistent with the goals and priorities of council, they were more likely to be implemented.

Conclusion

Recreation planning is an important, but time consuming and costly process for communities. These plans offer municipality’s innovative strategies to address the changing nature of leisure services and the populations they serve. The plans often involve extensive public involvement and consultation that aim to ensure the plans are unique and specific to the communities they are meant to serve. The benefits of leisure services (Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991) are well-understood by practitioners and recreation planners and, as seen in the Placeville plan, can serve as a base for the plans purpose and vision for the communities future. However, as Eagles and Gebhardt (in press) point out, the implementation of plans in Ontario varies across municipalities, but is often weak. The findings of this study contribute to the small body of knowledge in

recreation planning and specifically the process of recreation plan implementation. The findings of this study show that due to the highly political environment of recreation, recreation practitioners need strategies to get their plans off the shelf and implemented.

Despite the prevalence and importance of recreation planning in municipalities, research in the field recreation planning is sparse. The research into the implementation of all plans, including recreation is only developing and needs further exploration. I offer the following three suggestions for future research into recreation planning. First, there is a need for longitudinal data following a planning process into implementation.

Longitudinal data can help answer questions regarding the relationship of how a plan is developed, for example the degree of public involvement to the success of implementation. Secondly, as we have seen in this study the political context of a community impacts implementation, therefore further research into the perceptions and ability of recreation departments to position themselves at the top of the budget are needed. And thirdly, as noted in this study, departments that have had success in the past (such as the major community centre partnership in Parkertown) may have a greater ability to obtain support and funding in the future. Research into the relationship of successful projects and future funding would help practitioners push to have a creative and innovative project in their community and move beyond status quo.

Many Ontario municipalities make significant investments to develop recreation plans to guide their departments into the future. However, it is only with effective implementation that the benefits of these plans can be realized. It is hoped that the findings of this study provide communities with strategies and motivation to navigate

through the political terrain of plan implementation, to raise the status of recreation in their communities and to prepare for the change that implementation will bring.

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Appendix A – Letter of Invitation – Municipality
January 2008

Title of Study: "What Gets Plans Off the Shelf? A Multi-site Case Study of the Factors Influencing Municipal Recreation Plan Implementation"

Principal Investigator: Michelle Walsh, MA Candidate, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University

Faculty Supervisors: Dr. Erin Sharpe, Assistant Professor and Dr. Martha Barnes, Assistant Professor, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University

I, Michelle Walsh, MA Candidate, from the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled "What gets plans off the shelf? A multi-site case study of the factors influencing municipal recreation plan implementation".

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the factors that influence municipal recreation plan implementation. This study will address this problem using a multi-site case study of the recreational planning process. I am interested in the recreation planning process your community recently completed and the process of implementing the corresponding plan. I would like to collect documents and speak with various people who are informed of the planning process and the implementation of the plan (i.e. director of recreation, city councillor, steering committee member and planning consultant). More specifically, I will be asking questions related to the quality of the plan, the capacity of the parks and recreation department, the public support of the plan and the political context of implementation.

The expected duration your participation is approximately one hour for a formal interview. Following the interview, I may wish to contact you again to clarify points or to ask another set of similar questions. You may decide at that time whether or not you wish to participate in that part of the study.

This research should benefit your community by identifying determinants of implementation and providing a further understanding into the process of recreation plan implementation. This study will use your experiences to identify effective public involvement strategies and strategies to negotiate the political environment. This information will ultimately prove to be valuable to the municipal parks and recreation departments when further implementing their recreation plans and will help future cities and parks departments when developing similar processes. Furthermore, it will draw research attention back to recreation planning, an important aspect of recreation services.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you

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This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board (file # XXX)

Appendix B – Letter of Invitation - Individual

January 2008

Title of Study: "What Gets Plans Off the Shelf? A Multi-site Case Study of the Factors Influencing Municipal Recreation Plan Implementation"

Principal Investigator: Michelle Walsh, MA Candidate, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University

Faculty Supervisors: Dr. Erin Sharpe, Assistant Professor and Dr. Martha Barnes, Assistant Professor, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University

I, Michelle Walsh, MA Candidate, from the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled "What gets plans off the shelf? A multi-site case study of the factors influencing municipal recreation plan implementation".

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the factors that influence municipal recreation plan implementation. This study will address this problem using a multi-site case study of the recreational planning process. I am interested in the recreation planning process your community recently completed and the process of implementing the corresponding plan. I will be talking to different people involved in the planning and implementation process (ie. director of parks and recreation, city councillors, planning consultants). More specifically, I will be asking question related to the quality of the plan, the capacity of the parks and recreation department, the public awareness of the plan and the political context of implementation.

The expected duration your participation is approximately one hour for a formal interview. Following the interview, I may wish to contact you again to clarify points or to ask another set of similar questions. You may decide at that time whether or not you wish to participate in that part of the study.

This research should benefit your community by identifying determinants of implementation and providing a further understanding into the process of recreation plan implementation. This findings of this study will help to identify effective public involvement strategies and strategies to negotiate the political environment. This information will ultimately prove to be valuable to the municipal parks and recreation departments when further implementing their recreation plans and will help future cities and parks departments when developing similar processes. Furthermore, it will draw research attention back to recreation planning, an important aspect of recreation services.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you

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This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board (file # XXX)

Appendix C - Informed Consent Form

Date: January 2008

Project Title: "What Gets Plans off the Shelf? A Multi-site Case Study of the Factors Influencing Municipal Recreation Plan Implementation"

Principal Investigator:
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INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a study on municipal recreation planning. The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that influence municipal recreation plan implementation. The purpose of this research project is to investigate the factors that influence municipal recreation plan implementation. This study will address this problem using a multi-site case study of the recreational planning process. I am interested in the recreation planning process your community recently completed and the process of implementing the corresponding plan. I will be talking to different people involved in the planning and implementation process (ie. director of parks and recreation, city councillors, planning consultants). More specifically, I will be asking question related to the quality of the plan, the capacity of the parks and recreation department, the public awareness of the plan and the political context of implementation.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in an interview. With your permission, I would like to tape record the interview for transcription purposes. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. Following the interview, I may wish to contact you again to clarify points or to ask another set of similar questions. You may decide at that time whether or not you wish to participate in that part of the study.

Participation will take approximately 1 hour of your time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

Possible benefits of participation include identifying determinants of implementation and providing a further understanding into the process of recreation plan implementation. This findings of this study will help to identify effective public involvement strategies and strategies to negotiate the political environment. This information will ultimately prove to be valuable to the municipal parks and recreation departments when further implementing their recreation plans and will help future cities and parks departments when developing similar processes. Furthermore, it will draw research attention back to recreation planning, an important aspect of recreation services.

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information you provide is considered confidential; your name and job title will not be included or, in any other way, associated with the data collected in the study. Also, because our interest is in the average responses of the entire group of participants, you will not be identified individually in any way in written reports of this research.

Data collected during this study will be stored in the home office of the principal investigator. Upon completion of the study, the data files will be destroyed. Access to this data will be restricted to the Principal Investigator and the Co-Supervisors.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available from Michelle Walsh upon completion of the study at her contact email.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Investigator or the Faculty Supervisor using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D – Interview Guide

Questions for Planning Consultant

1. Can you tell me about how the planning process got started in xx city? When did you become involved?
2. Please describe your role in the planning process.
3. Who was involved in creating the plan? Can you describe this process? In what ways were the public involved in the planning process? Is this your typical way of doing this? Or was there something unique about xx city?
4. What was the public's reaction to the plan? Did they know about it?
5. Who is responsible for implementation? What did you advise the department for getting this underway? Are these typical strategies you suggest?
6. How do you foresee implementation going for xx city? What do you think will be their biggest challenges? What do you think they will be very successful at?
7. What challenges has the community or will the community face with implementation?
8. What role do staff play in implementation? Do you think the staff have what they need to get the plan implemented?
9. What was city councils role during the plan creation? Is there a champion on council? What about the mayor? What do you think their role is now?
10. You have developed many plans what there anything unique about xx city? How do you think this might impact implementation?
11. We have touched on a number of factors of implementation. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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Questions for Recreation Director

1. Prior to this plan, when was the last plan by the municipality done? Was this a plan that staff adopted and tried to implement? Why or why not? What will be different about the current plan?
2. How did the process get started? When did the planning process start? Why was it started in the first place? Who initiated the project?

3. Please describe your role in the planning process.
4. Who was involved in creating the plan? Can you describe this process? How were these individuals chosen?
5. What has happened since council approved your plan? What did council support mean? ie. In principle, money, further studies - meaning what did they actually support?
6. What are some major projects that have begun? Major projects on the horizon?
7. Who is responsible for the plan implementation? What has been the department's strategy for getting things underway?
8. Has implementation been easy? Have there been challenges within your department with regards to implementation? Is there anything that has facilitated implementation?
9. Have job assignments changed since the implementation process has begun? Is there someone in particular who is responsible for overseeing specific projects?
10. What has city council's role been during this process? Is there a champion for the plan on council? What about the mayor? Has there been an election since council accepted this plan? Has a change in council affected the plan in anyway?
11. What has the public's reaction been to the plan? Any ideas about what contributed to the public's reaction?
12. Are there any other key stakeholders that are championing this plan? or aspects of this plan? Are residents involved in implementation – such as a recreation council?